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193





MEDITATIONS  
ON THE LOVE OF GOD



# MEDITATIONS ON THE LOVE OF GOD

*in the form of a Retreat and an Instruction  
on the Gift of Oneself to God*

BY FATHER NICHOLAS GROU, S.J.

*With a Foreword*

BY ABBOT CUTHBERT BUTLER, O.S.B.

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## FOREWORD

BY THE RIGHT REV. ABBOT CUTHBERT BUTLER, O.S.B.

ANOTHER of Père Grou's works in English will be welcomed by all familiar with his *Manual of Interior Souls* and *Spiritual Maxims*. The meditations on the Love of God are planned for an eight days' retreat, and anyone making a serious private retreat will surely find them helpful. They will, of course, be equally good as food for ordinary meditation or consideration. The present writer has for many years past made his retreat on one or other of Père Grou's works, these meditations among them. Such things are matter of personal appreciation; but for him Père Grou is more gripping than any other spiritual writer. He is very ingoing, and, like every spiritual writer worth his salt, very exacting; but he is full of saving reasonableness. What can be at once more reasonable, but also more penetrating, than the injunction "to behave in such a way that others have nothing to put up with from us"? How simple it seems; how obvious; how well within reach it ought to be! Yet for Père Grou it would spell "eminent virtue," perfect interior mortification.

Père Grou is in the line of remarkable spiritual

writers that has existed in the Society of Jesus from the beginning, carrying on the older traditions of prayer and contemplation, as understood in the earlier ages: such were Père Balthasar Alvarez, St Teresa's director; Pères Lallemant, Surin, Caussade, Grou, and in our own day Père Poulain. A special interest attaches to Père Grou, in that he spent the last years of his life in England, at Lulworth, as chaplain in the family of that great Catholic, Thomas Weld.



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# ON THE LOVE OF GOD

## PRELIMINARY MEDITATION FOR THE EVE OF THE RETREAT

“ I am come to cast fire on the earth, and what will I but that it be enkindled ?”—ST LUKE xii 49.

### FIRST POINT.

What is this fire that Jesus Christ came to cast upon the earth ? It is Divine Love. The Word was made Flesh, dwelt amongst us, passed through the various states of his mortal life: worked, taught, suffered, only in order to teach us, by precept and example, to love God: only to obtain for us, to merit for us, to communicate to us himself, the grace to love God. This grace is the greatest of all his benefits: it presupposes or includes all the others. The True God was hardly known or loved before Jesus Christ came: and it is only by him that God will be known and loved to the end of time. He is the Sun of Love, the true Light which enlightens and gives the warmth of supernatural life to every man coming into the world.

What share have I taken, up to the present time, in this benefit of Jesus Christ ? If my soul is not burning with this sacred fire, is it due to him, or is it not entirely my own fault ? How much I have

here to confound and humble me ! But, at the same time, what heartfelt acts of thanksgiving do I not owe to thee, my Saviour !

#### SECOND POINT.

Jesus Christ wills nothing else than that this fire should be kindled in the hearts of men. He wills nothing else, as God ; because his glory and our happiness, which are the two ends of his works, are attached to the love of God, and depend on it as effects on their cause. As Man, he has no other desire ; because this is the one object of his mission, and this object will be perfectly fulfilled if he succeeds in kindling in all hearts that fire which burns in the inhabitants of Heaven, and which they draw from its very source in the Bosom of the Divinity. Heaven is the true home of this fire which has come down to this earth only to mount up once more to Heaven, and carry us there with it. But before it can do this it must consume everything that is of the earth in us, and it can never raise us up to the abode of glory and beatitude, so long as there remains anything in our souls that has not been purified.

If Jesus Christ does not will and cannot will anything else than to enkindle this fire in me, ought I to will anything else myself ? Am I not the enemy of God, if I put an obstacle in my heart to the one means by which he wills to ensure his glory ? Am I not the enemy of Jesus Christ, if I hinder or thwart the great design which called him down to earth, if I

oppose his most burning desire? Am I not my own enemy if I do not open my heart to this sacred flame, which is the sole source of holiness and happiness for me? I must choose either the one or the other of two fires. I must choose either to burn eternally with the fire of Divine Love, or in the fire of hell. Ah! Lord, can I hesitate between the fire of thy Love or the flames of thine anger; between the fire with which thou dost thyself burn and which causes thy happiness, and that which burns the demons, and causes their despair, their rage, and their hopeless misery?

### THIRD POINT.

This fire which Jesus Christ came to bring on earth, and which he wills to be enkindled, will not burn in my heart, or at least will not burn with increasing brightness, if I do not myself desire that it should be lighted there, if I do not maintain it, feed it, and fan it into greater heat by my own co-operation. I received the first spark, the germ of it, in my Baptism. By an act of his pure goodness God kindled it within me; it was impossible for me to merit this grace, but he has charged me constantly to fan it and feed it. Have I done so since I came to the age of reason and knew the value of Divine Charity and sanctifying grace? How many times have I extinguished this Fire by mortal sin? That I have extinguished it I know; but I do not know with absolute certainty whether it has been kindled again by the Sacrament of Penance;

and if it has been, this is a new benefit which I owe to thy free Goodness, O God. Again, am I not sadly to blame for having allowed this Charity to be weakened by so many negligences, by so much lukewarmness, and by an innumerable multitude of venial faults, the habits of which have exposed me to the danger of losing charity altogether, and perhaps for ever? Have I not also much to reproach myself with as to having wasted or perhaps even abused many means of sanctification, many interior and exterior graces, all of which were intended to increase this divine fire in me?

In order to lament before thee, O God, my past sins, my present tepidity and slothful conduct; to make reparation for them, and, by thy Grace, to form holy and firm resolutions for the future, I now begin this Retreat: and I do so with the intention of learning how truly to love thee, and of beginning once for all to do so in good earnest.

Behold my heart, O Lord Jesus; I offer it to thee and leave thee the Master of it. Prepare it to receive thy holy love: this is thy desire, it is also mine. I do not ask of thee sweetness nor consolations, but I shall be content if I carry away from these spiritual exercises a will firmly determined to consecrate every moment of my life to the love of God; to put in practice all the means, to profit by all occasions to increase it within me, and to have this end and aim alone in all my thoughts, my wishes, my actions, and my sufferings. Amen.



# FIRST DAY

## FIRST MEDITATION

### ON THE LOVE OF GOD FOR HIMSELF

#### FIRST POINT.

From all eternity God knows himself, and sees himself as he is, the Being existing of himself, infinitely perfect. He cannot contemplate his Perfections without loving them with a love as infinite as these perfections themselves, and in this knowledge and love he finds his supreme happiness, knowing that he is, and necessarily ever will be, that which he is; that he will always know and love himself; that he will be always his own beatitude, sufficient in himself and having need of no other joy. And take notice of the order of things: Knowledge, Love, Happiness. He loves himself because he knows himself, and knows that there can be none better nor so good as himself: he is happy because he loves himself, and because in possessing himself he possesses the supreme Good. These three things, in God—to know himself, to love himself, and to be happy—do not follow one another but accompany one another; they are one thing, the very nature of God himself, which is knowledge of himself, love of himself, and felicity in himself. But, according to our ways of understanding and in every other being except God, love

presupposes knowledge, and happiness presupposes knowledge and love. Knowledge is the motive of love, and happiness is the effect of both the one and the other.

#### SECOND POINT.

God loves himself necessarily: and, strictly speaking, he loves himself alone. Before he created anything, he loved only himself: all his love terminated in himself and, so to say, spent itself on himself alone. Creation made no change in this. He loves his creatures which are his work: but he does not love them in themselves nor for themselves; he loves himself in them and refers them to himself. The love he has for himself extends to all he has created outside of himself, and specially to those intelligent beings which he made after his image and likeness. Thus, the love which God has for us is no other than the love which he has for himself, and although this love is free in its exterior effects, it is necessary in its principle. That is to say, that God, because he loves himself, is not able not to love me, unless I render myself unworthy of his love by ceasing to love him myself; that just because he is happy he cannot but will to make me happy according to my capacity, and according to the kind of happiness to which he has been pleased to destine me; and that he will actually put me in possession of that felicity provided that I, on my part, fulfil the indispensable condition to which he has attached it, and this condition is nothing else

## ON THE LOVE OF GOD FOR HIMSELF 7

but to love him. My happiness is only a communication to me of his happiness, and without this communication it is impossible that I should be happy; but it adds nothing to his happiness; just as, if I should render myself unhappy through not loving him, my misery would take nothing from him. Thus, God finds only in himself the reason for loving me, and for willing my happiness; and that love, in so far as I am the object of it, is entirely gratuitous, entirely pure and disinterested on his part; since, whether he created me or not, whether I love him or not, whether I am happy or miserable, he neither does nor will love himself any the less, he neither is nor will be less happy.

### THIRD POINT.

God is, absolutely, the only Being who has the right to love him, because he knows himself: who can be happy by the knowledge and love of himself, and who can love nothing except with regard to himself and from the love he bears to himself. Every creature that knows itself finds, in its own depths, purely nothing. And what can there be worthy of love in that which is purely nothing? Every creature finds in its will only the capacity to swerve from the order which its Creator has prescribed for it; and this capacity is an imperfection which ought to humble it, and which certainly is not worthy of love; by its limited faculties it becomes conscious of its incapacity to satisfy itself in itself; and its very desires

prove its powerlessness, since it cannot fulfil them. In all this, what is there to love? Whatever good the creature finds in itself comes from another, beginning with its existence; and this imposes upon it the obligation of loving its Author, and of giving back to him all that it has received from him. Thus, if a created nature, however perfect we may suppose it, sees in itself no reason whatever for loving itself for its own sake, and if, on the contrary, it only sees reasons for not loving itself, still less can it find happiness in loving itself, since any love it can have for itself, lacking foundation, can only deceive it and procure for it a false happiness. Still more, since to love itself thus would be an extreme disorder, such love could only result in making it profoundly miserable. Finally, as a created nature has no right to love itself for its own sake, it withdraws more and more from right order when it loves anything for itself, referring that thing to itself as to its end. And if it is true that it cannot love any other creature in this way, it would be a most terrible subversion of right order if it were to love God only for love of itself, regarding itself as the centre to which its love for God should tend.

This meditation is a little dry and abstract; but it is necessary, to make clear what that love is which we owe to Almighty God. The affections of the heart follow the lights of the mind, and before loving we must know. This consideration leads us to two truths of the utmost importance: first, that God,

necessarily loving himself for his own sake alone, and all else in reference to himself, we ought also to love him for himself only, and to love ourselves and everything else in reference to him; the second truth is, that all admixture of self-love sullies the purity of love which is due to God, and that this is a disorder which puts an obstacle to our holiness and our happiness.

## SECOND MEDITATION

GOD HAS CREATED ME IN ORDER THAT I MAY  
LOVE HIM FOR HIMSELF ALONE

### FIRST POINT.

All the works of God outside himself are the outpouring of his Goodness and purely favours bestowed by him. The first of these is Creation, and all the others follow in its train. Such a Benefactor as God, who can owe nothing save to himself alone, who does nothing and could do nothing save with a view to himself, since outside of himself nothing exists or could exist except by an act of his Power and of his Will; such a Benefactor, I say, can propose to himself no other end than to cause his Infinite Goodness to be admired and loved. It cannot be doubted that his innumerable, inestimable benefits—all directed to our sovereign and eternal happiness—form a most powerful motive to make us love God, and he has expressly willed that we should thus use them. Our

ingratitude would be extreme if we should use them with any other end in view. But does God will, and could he will, that I should love him only for these benefits, and that I should not rise up to what he is in himself, and to the love he deserves for his own sake? I maintain that this is absolutely impossible, and repugnant equally to the nature of the Beneficent God, and to the quality of his benefits. If God is the First Principle and the End of all, it necessarily follows that all, coming as it does from him, must return to him again finally. If there is one thing of which he is jealous, it is of the love of his creatures; and why should he not be jealous of it, since it is due to him, exclusive of all others, and how should it be due to him in this way if he were not the only Being infinitely worthy to be loved for himself? What need had he of creatures? None whatever. Did he make them that they should, in the first place, love themselves, and then, afterwards, love him on account of his benefits? This would be absurd indeed—that a creature should begin by loving itself, and only love its Creator because of the goods he has given already, or those benefits he has promised to give in the future. Does he deserve love only because he is a Benefactor? Is there not another reason incomparably more excellent, in his own Nature and in his Infinite Perfections? God demands, and has the right to demand, that his rational creatures should love him, first of all, for himself alone, and that afterwards they should do so from the motives of gratitude and hope,



which should serve to increase this their love. Thus, the love that springs from gratitude or from hope cannot, strictly speaking, be called the charity which I owe to God and which he asks from me: and if the motive that he is supremely worthy of love is not the principal and most powerful that moves my heart to love him, I do not realize his benefits as I ought, but I make myself unworthy of his promises and unable to enjoy them.

#### SECOND POINT.

God has given me an understanding. For what purpose? Is it to know created things? Is it to know myself? No: my intelligence ought to rise higher, and, by the knowledge of creatures and of myself, to attain to the knowledge of God, to contemplate his Perfections, and to repose in that contemplation: true it is that my mind is not equal to understanding the infinite. God alone can comprehend himself; but my mind is able to know him and strive after the knowledge of him with all its powers; and this longing after the knowledge of God is so deeply rooted in it, that no finite knowledge can satisfy its thirst. And further, whatever science my mind cultivates, to whatever object I direct my attention, whether I reflect on myself or on others, all lifts me up towards God or draws me back to him; he is the first link of the chain to which all truths are attached; he is also the last End to which they all tend: I know nothing fully, either in the physical or in the

moral order, if I know not God: and I cannot reason on anything as I ought, if I know not God the First Cause and Last End of all things. Is it not evident that God has given me such an intelligence solely to the end of knowing and loving him? That not only the most noble use that I can make of it is to apply it to this object, but that if I apply it to any other object without any reference to God, I misuse it for a purpose contrary to his intention.

God has given me a will capable of loving and of choosing. Why? Surely, because it should love that which is worthy, is deserving of love! But nothing else but himself alone is really, perfectly, supremely worthy of love. Whatever is found in creatures that is beautiful and good, from whence does it come but from him who is himself supreme Beauty and Goodness? Has he made them that I should fix and centre my love in them for themselves? Has he given me the use of them for me to attach myself to them and forget him? Do they not all say to me, each in its own language, "Do not rest in us, rise up to our common Maker; it was in order that you might love him that he has given you the right and enjoyment of us"? The will being blind can allow itself to be led away by the senses, by the imagination, by the passions. But the understanding is intended to enlighten it, and to direct its affections. If the will follows the pure light of the understanding it will be carried on to love God only, in himself and in all things created. God has en-

dowed me with free-will. Why? Is it that I may dispose of my own self and all that depends on me, just as I choose? Did he intend to make me my own master, authorize me to withdraw myself from his dominion? Such a thought could never be seriously entertained. His design has been that, loving him freely and by my own choice, giving him the preference over all else, I might by that love give him glory, and merit to receive reward from him. His first object was his own glory; his second, my happiness. If I begin by glorifying him, in loving him freely for his own sake, he will afterwards render me happy by that very love, granting me the incomparable advantage of seeing him, loving and possessing him for ever. But if I should reverse this order and love him for the recompense merely, I should not only lose the merit, but be also deprived for ever of the recompense.

### THIRD POINT.

Let us dwell a little on the desire of happiness, and see if it is opposed to the love of God for his own sake. I wish to be happy as a necessary consequence of the love I have for myself; there can be no question of that. But from whence comes this desire? From the need and poverty of my own nature. If I were sufficient for myself, I should not *wish* for happiness, I should *have* it. Then, where does this wish lead me? Surely beyond myself; towards some Being better than myself, an infinite Being, such as alone is

capable of satisfying the immensity of my desires; in a word, towards God, considered as the Supreme Good. I know him, then, as Sovereign Goodness, I love him as such in himself and for himself, before I wish to be united with him as *my* sovereign Good. For how could I desire him, if I did not know that he is infinitely perfect and worthy of love in himself; and if I did not love him first with regard to himself, before loving him in his relation to me? The evil reflections and inclinations of self-love come in to spoil all this, and when they interfere they change the proper order of these relations between God and my soul. But self-love and the well-regulated order of love of myself are two widely different things. Well-ordered love makes me wish for my own happiness and seek it in God as the Source of all perfection and bliss, as the Being who alone deserves to be loved for his own sake, in which way I do really love him by well-ordered love and by a direct act; whom I afterwards go on to love by reflecting on him as my last End, and the principle of my happiness; not for my own sake, referring God to myself, but as referring myself to him. The evil of self-love consists in this, that it considers nothing, neither happiness, nor even God himself, except in reference to itself; it makes its own advantage its end, it appropriates everything to itself, and considers the possession of God and his love as merely a means subordinate to its own well-being. By this strange reversal of order, the love of myself becomes my principal and dominant love, and the

love of God but a secondary love. I wish for my own happiness and love myself before everything else; I love God after, and only wish to possess him as a Good that is necessary for my own happiness.

But can it possibly be that God, who has implanted so intense a desire and need of happiness in my nature—a happiness that I can only find in himself—can it possibly be that he has the intention of this, of dispensing me from loving him for his own sake and, in some way, reducing me to love him for my own benefit? Such an idea is unreasonable to the last degree. What! Could God be infinitely worthy of love in himself, as such, the Supreme Good, the Beginning and End of the happiness of every creature that has intelligence, and yet, because I could not be happy without him, that it should be impossible for me to love him for his own sake and could only desire him with an eye to my own happiness? This would be the conclusion to which such an idea would lead! If this were true, I should not hesitate to say that God could not create beings capable of happiness, because he would thus essentially injure his own Glory: and he would consequently have to limit himself to his own love of himself, without willing to create beings to love him in a manner so unworthy of himself. The desire of happiness itself would be vain in man if he could not love and, indeed, if he *ought* not to love God for himself alone: since he cannot arrive at happiness, save by this love.

## THIRD MEDITATION

## ON THE SAME SUBJECT

## FIRST POINT.

"*God is love,*" says St John, and the sole Source of all love. He it is who, by the Holy Spirit, has put the eternal love of the Father and of the Son into our hearts. What other love could God pour into our hearts than that charity wherewith he loves himself? From all eternity there has been no other love, nor is there any other, nor can there be till the end of time. This love is pure, infinitely pure in its origin; it is poured into every Christian soul at Baptism and infuses into it the selfsame pure love; and it would be always pure in its acts, if self-love with its disorder did not rush in to soil it by miserable self-seeking. Neither gratitude nor hope can affect its purity. The motive powers of these two virtues accord perfectly with that of charity, and in no way interfere with it unless self-love insinuates itself into its motives and infects them in a greater or lesser degree with its poison. It is quite possible for me to love God for his benefits, for the rewards which he has promised and which I confidently expect from him; and at the same time to love him much more for his own sake. What does it matter, after all, that, when I love God by the particular motive of gratitude or of hope, I do not then love him by the formal motive of charity? Does charity any the less live in my heart? The other virtues (of gratitude and hope) that I rank



below charity and which I practise when grace inspires me—will these weaken the habit of charity? What God asks of me is that this habit should *predominate* in me, and that acts of the love of God for his own sake may be the more frequent; that charity should never be lessened by the sight of his benefits, nor the hope of his promises, nor even by the fear of his chastisements, but that it should always be the mistress and queen over all my other affections. This being understood, not only does God not forbid, but he expressly wills that fear of his judgements should sometimes make me avoid evil and do good; that, on the other hand, the remembrance of his benefits should penetrate me with gratitude and attract me to draw nearer to him by giving to him willingly whatever he may ask; that, in other circumstances, the hope of the rewards he has promised may encourage me to overcome difficulties in the practice of virtue, may inspire me with generous contempt for the things of earth, may sustain me in sufferings and in affliction. All these motives may be traced in the Life of Jesus Christ and of his Apostles; and both the Old and New Testaments present us with many examples, inculcating them upon us, recommending and even commanding us to use them; and certainly neither Jesus Christ nor the Prophets nor the Apostles would have thought that such would the least in the world prejudice the purity of charity and the obligation to keep and strengthen the habit of it, or otherwise their own practice would have been different.

## SECOND POINT.

Why should God not will to be loved for his own sake above all? We, vile and miserable creatures as we are, we aim at being thus loved and acknowledge no other sentiment as being truly love. What husband would not think he had the right to be shocked if he should have reason to suspect that his wife loved him from interested motives, and not for his own sake? And the same on the wife's part. Or what father would care much for the affection and obedience of his children if he knew it did not spring from their feeling that he was their father, but rather from the expectations they might have for future advantages? Even a master likes to be served with sincere attachment and by those who do not only act faithfully in order to gain the wages due to them. Friendship would degenerate into simple traffic if the principal motives were merely mutual benefits, or services the only bond of union! It is sometimes said that the great of this world have but few friends, and the reason is just this, that men seek their friendship generally to satisfy ambition or with some other interested view. What! Men are sensitive to the extreme as to the disinterested love they exact from their friends, and God, God who alone has the right to be loved, God, who is necessarily jealous of our heart's love, he who discerns and knows the most intimate of our affections—can it be that he should care less than they, or be indifferent as to whether we

love him for his own sake, or first for ourselves? If so, by his benefits and his promises he must intend to weaken the first and great title by which he claims our love! What are all our titles of Husband, Father, Master, Friend, in comparison with his? Is he not all this, only in an eminent degree, in our regard? Does he not unite in himself and infinitely surpass all those rights which we have towards one another? And further, has he not one title to our love that no one else can possibly claim—I mean the absolute and infinite Perfection of his Nature—of which all that is worthy of love in us is but a shadow, a vestige, a feeble participation? Up to a certain measure, God authorizes pure love among men, provided that it be referred to him; he commands the same between husband and wife, between parents and children, between relations united by blood, and could we suppose that he does not require as much for himself, but would be satisfied with love dictated by self-interested motives? Nothing shows us more clearly the blindness and injustice of which self-love is capable, than that it dares to ask for itself what it disputes with or refuses to God.

### THIRD POINT.

Far from contesting the right God has to that pure love which he alone deserves, I ought to find all my glory and happiness in loving him thus. My true nobleness consists in being capable of knowing and loving God; and the perfect satisfaction of my mind

and my heart can be found only in this knowledge and love. That which makes the felicity, the bliss of God, ought here to begin my own happiness which will be consummated in Heaven. How great is this my destiny ! It unites me inseparably with God, and nothing less than this love and the possession of this Supreme Good can make me happy. What degradation for me, if I prostitute my love on anything less than God ! God offers me happiness, and offers it to me in the enjoyment of his very Self, and I go hunting after my happiness elsewhere ! The only condition he imposes is that I should love him, and I will not fulfil it ! He shows me that inevitable misery, irreparable loss, supreme evil, the loss of the Sovereign Good, must be the result if I do not love him, and yet I am not touched : I will not detach myself from creatures, in order to attach myself to the Creator !

And yet I know that I am deceiving myself ; and that in the objects that seduce me from him I am pursuing a happiness that will always elude my grasp ; or, rather, I imagine that in their enjoyment I shall find a happiness which is never to be found there, because it is not there that happiness dwells, nor can ever dwell. Reason, and that experience which is more persuasive even than reason, convince me of this equally. Am I not, then, my own mortal enemy ? How must I curse this wretched self-love which deprives me of the Supreme, the Unique Good, which leaves me to my own poverty and

emptiness and would feed me only with a vain smoke, which will itself be torn from me one day, and will leave me in the despair that must result from the eternal loss of all that is Good—that is, God.

The disorder into which I fall by refusing to God the love that is justly due to him is so great that it is impossible for me to form an adequate idea of it. Nothing less than an infinite intelligence could understand it. By this I become a monster, an object of horror not only to God, but to every creature that is the friend of order. With a little reflection on it I must feel a horror of myself. And further, when I leave this world, if I die without having the love of God in my heart I shall of my own accord throw myself into hell, as the only place for which I am fit.

## CONSIDERATION

### ON ACTS OF LOVE TO GOD

The considerations of this Retreat will be on the means of preserving and increasing the love of God in our hearts, on the use that we have made of these means up to the present time, and how we ought to take advantage of them in future. Acts of the love of God will be the subject of the first.

The habit of divine charity is infused into our hearts in order that it may be exercised by acts. Otherwise that habit would remain idle contrary to the express will of God: this would be a very great

evil, but, beyond this, we should expose ourselves to the danger of losing it altogether if we should allow it to remain idle. We know that in Baptism we have received this precious habit; but we have no certainty of having kept it, or, if lost, having recovered it by repentance. Although God forbids all anxiety on the subject when our conscience finds nothing to reproach us with, because his intention in leaving us in uncertainty is to keep us humble; nevertheless, nothing is more consoling for us than the power to be able to bear witness to ourselves; and one of the most assuring proofs that we have it is when we often make acts of love of God. What an advantage, what sweetness, what a source of peace to a true Christian it is, to be able to say with St Augustine: "My God, my conscience bears me witness that I do love thee!" But to do this it is necessary to have this charity alive in our hearts, and we can only keep it alive, and feel it living, by the acts which it produces. If these acts come really from the heart, and not only from our mouth, it is a mark that divine love lives there; if these acts are frequent, it is a sign that our love is full of strength and vigour. If, on the contrary, they are rare and only in word, if they are not accompanied by sincere feeling, it is a proof that love is weak and languid: and, if considerable time passes without our making any such acts at all, it is a proof that love is dead within us.

A Christian is obliged not only to preserve divine charity but also to make the habit of the love of God



grow and increase within him. Of this there can be no doubt: although it is impossible to fix very definitely the limits of the obligation. Now, it is certain that any habit whatever is only preserved by acts of that habit, and the only rule by which we can judge if it is weakening or dying altogether, is when the acts of it become rare, or, perhaps, for a long while are not made at all. This holds good equally in regard to good and bad habits, to those which are supernatural or to such as are natural. It is certain, too, that any habit grows and becomes stronger in proportion to the frequency of the acts of it which we produce. From whence it follows that every Christian is obliged to make frequent acts of the love of God. From the fact that one cannot exactly determine how many such acts should be made in a month, or in a week, we may conclude that it is not possible to make them too often, and that we ought not to be satisfied with our dispositions on this point until we have reason to think that God is satisfied: and this takes us further than we might think: God not being satisfied with us until we love him with all our heart, all our mind and all our strength.

But how can we make as many acts as God wishes? What are the means we should take in order to do so? Here we reply, the way is simple, easy, and, at the same time, it is the *only* way: there is absolutely none other. Let God himself rule these acts, and not you yourself: and, indeed, you could only produce them through him. Begin, then, by making him

the entire Master over your heart and all its movements. Then pray to him every morning and beg of him to make you produce, during all that day, just so many acts of love as shall please him, for his glory and for your sanctification. After that, keep yourself all the day recollected in him, sufficiently recollected, that is, and sufficiently attentive to his inspirations, not to miss any one of those which he will offer you. Make, at least, this strong resolution: renew it every time when you find yourself getting distracted, and reproach yourself sharply and sincerely. You will find great advantage from this method, before you have used it long. If you can say that it is, doubtless, a sure way, but that it does not seem to you easy, that is because you do not love and do not wish to love. Embrace it courageously and God will make it easy to you. Would it not be strange if you should profess to practise the love of God without it costing you anything, any effort, any violence? Remember that your nature, which is corrupted by sin, recoils with all its strength from the love of God. Remember that you have increased its repugnance by your personal faults. Remember, in short, that the aim of the love of God is to destroy in you the work of sin, to raise you above nature, and to transform the animal man into a man all spiritual and even divine. And you wish to suffer no difficulty in the exercise of this love! This is a palpable contradiction. When I say that the means that I propose is an easy way, I would say that it is so to a good will, but not to nature.

You ask me what effects will be produced by these means, if faithfully practised? In the first place, God, seeing your efficacious determination, will give you his powerful aid; he will suggest to you frequent acts of love, in which you will taste so much sweetness that you will have an ardent desire to multiply them more and more; they will every day become more fervent and hearty; they will grow into a habit; you will make them without any effort, almost without perceiving that you make them; and, to use the expression of St Gregory of Nazianzen, they will come to be as easy, as natural, as continual as drawing breath. You would wish to reach this point? Begin, persevere, and you will arrive at it.

## SECOND DAY

### *ON THE PRECEPT OF THE LOVE OF GOD*

#### FIRST MEDITATION

ON THESE WORDS: "THOU SHALT LOVE THE  
LORD THY GOD"

##### FIRST POINT.

St Augustine was surprised, and with good reason, that man should need an express command to love God, as if the precept were not implanted in the very depths of nature. He was astonished that it should be necessary to threaten such an extreme penalty as that of hell, if man should not love God, as if it were not a great enough woe, and even the greatest of all, not to do so ! These feelings were worthy of a saint so eminent in love. But, since the appearance of sin in the world, this commandment and these threats have become necessary ; and it is enough to humble us profoundly when we think to what a point our nature is degraded and vitiated. In order to fill up the measure of our humiliation, let us only recall that, notwithstanding such a command and such terrible threats, yet we do not love, we find it hard work to love, we love so coldly ; this is because our heart attaches itself more willingly, more closely to any other object than God. Let us blush and be confounded,

and so let us enter upon the meditation on the words of the precept.

First let us think how Jesus Christ said that this is “*the first and the greatest commandment.*” It is the first, there has been no other, nor will there ever be one before this; it stands at the head and front of all the others. It is the greatest, by the Majesty of its Object, for it refers to God; by the exaltation of the feeling it inculcates, for it refers to love; by the extent it embraces, for it comprehends all and all is enclosed in it; by its end, which is the Glory of God and the happiness of every creature; by the strictness of its obligation, from which no one can be dispensed in any way, at any time, in any place, in any circumstance; by the penalty which follows upon its infraction, for the misery of man begins in the same instant that he violates it.

*Thou shalt love.* With what kind of love? With the love of preference to all other objects whatever, and to thine own self: thy love for God shall surpass, if it can, all other affection, in that same degree that the Object of it surpasses all else; thou shalt be ready, if occasion requires, to sacrifice all to him, even thine own life, rather than to offend him; thou shalt fear to displease him beyond and before all else; and thou shalt consider the smallest sin as an evil infinitely greater than all other evils of any other kind; thou shalt put the advantage of pleasing him before any other advantage of what value soever; and shalt be more jealous of his friendship than of that of the

greatest and dearest on earth. Not his Will merely, but his good pleasure shall be thy law, rule and standard; thou shalt trample underfoot all human respect, thou shalt despise all promises, all threats, and shalt overcome all obstacles to follow It.

*Thou shalt love* with the love of complaisance, contemplating with joy the infinite Perfections of God, admiring them, congratulating him on their possession, esteeming thyself happy in belonging to so perfect a Being and in depending upon him; and thyself far more glorious in that dependence, than if thou didst enjoy the empire of the whole universe.

*Thou shalt love* with a love of benevolence, and, since thou canst not wish for God any good with regard to his Nature that he does not already possess supereminently, thou shalt wish and desire that every creature may render to him all the glory that is due to him and which he expects from them; thou shalt be zealous for his honour, and procure and further it by every means in thy power, at the least by thy wishes and thy prayers desiring ardently that all men may know, adore, love and obey him; thou shalt be grieved in the depths of thy heart at the sight of the crimes which deluge the world; and thy zeal shall equal that of David who said: "*Fainting hath laid hold of me, because of the wicked that forsake thy law.*"<sup>1</sup>

*Thou shalt love* with an effective love, not limited to affections merely, which, if they produce nothing, will deceive thee; but they will not deceive God, so

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxviii 53.



## “SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD” 29

thou must act in such a way that thy deeds correspond to thy feelings.

*Thou shalt love* thus always and uninterruptedly, knowing that life is only given to thee for this, and that every moment that is not consecrated to the love of God is lost to him and to thyself. Thou shalt force thyself to love more every day, directing to this end all that happens to thee, all that thou doest, all that thou sufferest, all that passes in the world and which comes to thy knowledge; thou shalt regret not having loved him more or sooner, and shalt say with St Augustine: “O Beauty, ever ancient and ever new! Too late have I known thee! too late have I loved thee!” Reproach thyself for not having loved God enough, and supply for what is wanting in thy love by uniting it to the love of the Blessed, to the spirits in Heaven, the saints on earth, and above all to that of Jesus Christ, which thou canst take to thyself by the right which he has given thee, and this thou canst offer to God as alone being worthy of him.

### SECOND POINT.

*Thou shalt love the Lord.* The Lord above all. The only real Lord, to whom this title belongs in an incommunicable manner; he before whom all other lords tremble and are prostrate in the dust, recognizing, or, at least, being bound to recognize that they are nothing, that they hold their power from him, from whom they derive their authority, and that they

ought to use it only in his Name, according to his intentions and for his Glory. He whom thou art commanded to love is the Supreme Being, the only great, the only perfect, the only One existing by the necessity of his Nature, the only One infinitely worthy of love in himself and for himself. Vile creature that thou art ! fear and respect ought to annihilate thee before him ; he wills that thou shouldst love him, that thou shouldst aspire to his confidence, to his most familiar intimacy, that love should make thee sharer in his immense riches and be partaker of his glory and felicity. He desires this as ardently as if it were necessary to his own happiness ; he stoops down to ask thy love, in order to lift thee up to himself, and to unite, to consume, to absorb thee into him ! What ineffable condescension ! What incomparable favour ! Thy fear does not please him unless it leads to love ; thy homage does not delight him, if it is not dictated by love. He drew and attracted thee first, and does not ask thy love until he has given thee inestimable proofs of his. Thou shalt love the Lord, then, in view of his infinite Perfections, making that love the first and best beloved of thy duties, finding the greatest happiness in acts of it, and thou wilt find that the very love pays thee, and repays thee over and over again. This love should be its own motive and its own fulfilment, and thou wouldst say with St Bernard : “ I love in order to love : I love because I love.”

THIRD POINT.

"*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God.*" What is meant by "*thy God*"? It means thy Supreme, thine only Good. He has made thee that thou mayest possess him; he gives himself to thee; his Will is that nothing else shall be so intimately, surely, inseparably united to thee, as himself. He is thine, if thou lovest him, and thine in the exact degree of thy love. Direct thy faith, hope and charity to these short words "*thy God*," which, although they are so short, include everything. My God, who, in the order of nature, hast created me and all that I am; who dost preserve me every moment, whose powerful Hand has drawn me out of nothing and constantly keeps me from falling back by my own weight! From thee I hold everything that I possess and enjoy, and it is from thy Hand alone that I look for future good, which is not so much the result of my own talents or industry or of the goodwill of others, as it is owing to thy liberality and the dispositions of thy Providence. But what is all this compared to thee thyself, who art the Creator, the God of Nature, only in order to be my God. The world will pass away, but if thou still art mine I shall have no regret at the loss of earth. I cannot say "*my world*," but I can say "*my God*"; and this makes me infinitely richer than if the whole world were at my disposal.

And thou art my God in an incomparably higher order—the order of Grace. In the persons of my

first parents thou didst put me in a state that was very much higher than my condition by nature, in a state far beyond what my own desires or thoughts could attain to. After I had fallen from that happy state by sin, thou hast re-established me even more advantageously by adopting me as thine own child in the Person of thy Divine Son; and thou givest me in full abundance all the helps necessary to enable me to attain to my end. After I have offended thee, thou pardonest me every time I return to thee, and thou dost solicit me to return, making the first advances. How many motives I have for loving him who, without any need of me, loved me first! And why has he loved me? In order that I may love in my turn; and that in the transports of my gratitude I may say to him: "*Thou art my God.*"

In the order of Glory thou wilt be my God for ever. Thou hast destined me to the eternal possession of thyself, and to be a sharer in thine own felicity. By thine own Power, by an inconceivable excess of thy Goodness thou wilt raise my intelligence even to be able to see thee face to face, and to contemplate the brightness of thy eternal Majesty without being blinded: thou wilt enlarge my narrow and limited heart until it is capable of receiving and containing those torrents of pure delight which flow from thine Essence. Then shall I say with assurance and without fear that thou hast inebriated me for ever. "*Thou art my God, my Treasure, my All.*" Behold! oh my

soul ! He who, having loved thee from all eternity, and desiring to love thee for ever, deigns to command thee to love him during the short space of this life, in order to see, love and possess him for everlasting. What a command ! which has its source in the love of God for his creature, which only asks of the creature a return of love to him, and which assures her of the same love as an eternal reward ! Do you not say that it is supremely reasonable and infinitely sweet ? Ah ! that is not enough. The law he imposes is but that you should *will* to be happy, and should use the only means for being so.

## SECOND MEDITATION

### ON THE OTHER WORDS OF THE COMMAND

#### FIRST POINT.

*“Thou shalt love God with thy whole heart.”*

Can God be loved otherwise than with our whole heart ? Is it too much for a finite heart to love Infinite Beauty ? If I should love him with less than my whole heart, would he be satisfied ? Should I be satisfied myself ? Alas ! in loving him with all the strength of this heart, I love him far less than he deserves, and I shall always have to pray him to enlarge my heart, that I may love him more and more. I shall not love God

with my whole heart if I have any reserves with him, or put any limits to the proofs of my love, determining not to pass these limits: if I obstinately refuse the sacrifice of certain things he asks of me; or if I make a plan of devotion and confine myself to it, although Grace may be inviting me to go much further. In order to assure myself whether I have any reserves with God it is not necessary, nor is it well to give the reins to my imagination by supposing extraordinary circumstances in which, perhaps, I may never find myself, and cogitating as to how I should act if these were to arise. In this sort of suppositions many illusions may possess me, and give birth to much presumption on my part; we should never count on ourselves nor on our present sentiments, when the occasions have not yet come. Witness St Peter; his experience disabused him, and experience has convinced many another in the like way. Besides, we expose ourselves thus to falling into discouragement from cowardly fear, and into a kind of despair, feeling ourselves incapable of bearing certain trials, which God may never see fit to send our love. Never look forward to a future that may not come; that which we believe ourselves able to do, we might not really have power for; and that which we feel would be beyond our strength, will not be so, if God asks it of us. Let us be satisfied with examining our actual dispositions at the present time and see whether at this moment we are giving to God all that he asks of us, and if we do not put any



secret restrictions on our generosity in the offering of ourselves. Let us tell him, with as much sincerity as humility: "Thou, who alone canst penetrate the depths of my heart! oh! do not allow it ever to refuse thee anything, nor that it may oppose any resistance, whether open or hidden, to the loving demands of thy Grace."

The love of God does not allow of any division in my heart. God is supremely jealous and wishes to possess it entirely, because he deserves it all; he will have it to himself alone, because he alone deserves it, he has made it for no other than himself, nor could he. If I turn the least of my affection away from him to any creature in his place, I rob God of it; I take away from him that which is his by every right, and which he will not give up to anyone else. I must love absolutely himself alone, or, loving others, I must love them for him, in reference to him, because he wishes and as much as he wishes me to love them. In this way, all the affections of my heart will tend to him as their End and Aim, and will all unite in him as their Centre. "*We do not love thee enough, O my God,*" says St Augustine, "*if we love anything else with thee, and not for thee.*"

By this command to love God with our whole heart, self-love is absolutely proscribed, for by it we love ourselves for our own ends, without reference to God, and love other objects merely in relation to ourselves. This shows us, again, how pure our love to God ought to be, since it is soiled and marred by

any other love than that which has God for its first Beginning and last End. In a word, the human heart ought not to use its freedom for any purpose other than to attach itself to God: all creatures ought merely to serve to make it love him better; and we ought to fight and destroy in ourselves all that we see to be contrary to the love of God. Here is a vast field, indeed, for reflection and practice.

#### SECOND POINT.

*"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole mind."*

Whence comes my mind?—my intelligent soul? From God alone, to whom it belongs. I am able to cultivate it, but it does not belong to me. Why has God implanted it in me? Is it for me to use just as I like—for any object I please, whether good, indifferent or bad? That could not be. But what are the good objects on which God means me to exercise it? On himself, certainly, before anything else: afterwards, on created objects in so far as they are considered in reference to him; for they are only good when thus referred; and, if I dwell upon them for themselves, if I occupy myself with them in any other view than that of God, they cease to be good and useful in my regard; they will serve only to satisfy a vain and dangerous curiosity.

The proof that my mind is made for God is, that no other object can fully satisfy it, and only in the contemplation of God can it find its true repose.

The greater the quickness of intelligence with which the mind is endowed, the greater its thirst for science, the deeper it is able to dive into the knowledge of created things which begin in time, and pass away with time, the more it feels its own emptiness, the more it is disgusted with itself, the more it is inclined to pass from one kind of study to another, without being able to appease its insatiable hunger for knowledge. Self-love may sustain it for a while; but reflection and experience will at last convince it that all knowledge that does not tend towards God as its chief aim, is but vanity. The human mind needs real and solid nourishment which will fill it and leave nothing further to desire; not a passing and apparent reality such as that of facts which only belong to the realm of the memory; not an abstract and ideal truth such as that of numbers and figures which please and occupy the mind, but which do not satisfy it; but it needs an eternal, unchangeable, substantial and self-existing Verity. Every science worthy of the name leads the mind to this Verity, which is God. This Verity is the foundation and principle to which all the particular truths return, as to the first and universal Truth.

If I were quite alone with God in the world my mind would evidently be occupied with him, it could only apply itself to him, and to myself as in connection with him. The obligation of consecrating myself to him would then appear to me in all its force; I should see that it was not only just, but necessary;

I should occupy myself with him continually, without any distraction; and that occupation, far from being painful to me, would be so sweet and agreeable that I could not be deprived of it without at once being made miserable. But has God lost the right to occupy all my mind, because he has made other creatures which are so many free blessings of his to me, which serve as so many steps to raise my mind to him, which speak to me of his Power, his Wisdom and his other attributes, in which I can and ought to contemplate him with the utmost delight? The sight of other people, the dealings which I have with them, either by necessity, or use, or choice, do these things authorize me to turn my mind away from God, and ought they not, on the contrary, to recall it to him ceaselessly? In creating the world and instituting human society, could it be that the intention of God was to withdraw me from the remembrance of him? Or that the needs, business and duties of my state, my conversations, my studies, even those of choice or laudable curiosity, should so absorb me as to make me forgetful of him? No: the mind thinks of what it loves; and if I love God with my whole heart, I shall think of him with my whole mind. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks," and if my heart is full of God I shall be delighted to speak of him whenever an occasion shall occur, and I shall try to do so as often as possible. Without neglecting my duties or my business, I will look on it as my first and chief affair to meditate on the Nature of God, on

his Benefits, on the truths of Faith and Christian morals, in brief, on every reason that I have for fearing and loving him. Such is the only legitimate use that I can make of the natural and supernatural lights God has given me, and my intention will be that all I know or learn, may serve to make me love God more and more.

### THIRD POINT.

*"Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy strength."*

This means, in the first place, that being obliged to love God with all the strength which actual grace gives me (and that grace always increases by the exercise of love), I ought also to love God better day by day. For it is not with his love as it is with that of creatures. The love of creatures is strongest and most ardent at first; afterwards it grows weaker even through its own enjoyment, and at last finds satiety and disgust. With the love of God it is just the contrary. Divine love, feeble at the beginning as it generally is, grows and strengthens as it comes to know God better, as it tastes the sweetness and approaches more familiarly to him, enjoying his Presence more intimately. And as the strength to love God is, in us, entirely supernatural, and as it is God himself who implants the germ in our soul by the habit of charity, he augments this strength according to the good use we make of it; the germ of love develops and acquires by degrees an incredible

vigour. Love progresses of itself towards infinity, and the rapidity of its progress answers to the fidelity of the soul when it loses no occasion of proving its love for God.

In the second place, this precept means that I ought to consecrate to God all my plans, all my views, all my actions, having no other intention in them but that of pleasing him; fulfilling all my duties only for love of him; employing my talents, my goods, my possessions, my credit and my authority to make him loved better; to have an ardent zeal for his Glory, and to further it as much as lies in my power, as much as my state of life permits, as grace may inspire me and wise advice may rule and direct me.

In the third place, it means that I should struggle without intermission and with all my power against every obstacle that can be put in the way of my love to God, whether on the part of corrupt nature, of the world or of the devil; and because my efforts against such powerful enemies are very weak, or rather, nothing at all, that with all the more reason I must have continual recourse to prayer, and to the other weapons which religion offers me against such terrible adversaries, and which God puts at my disposition.

In the last place, it tells me, in suffering, to support it first with resignation and patience, afterwards with a tranquil submission, a perfect conformity of my will, and in all the trials which it may please God to send me, to rejoice spiritually, whether these are such as afflict the body, or such as grieve and pain the



mind, or which mortify the heart; whether these ills are natural, and come in the ordinary course of life; whether they are brought upon me by men; whether they are supernatural, such as vexations and temptations of which the devil is the author, or such crucifying and purifying trials as are sent me immediately from the Hand of God.

Have I ever looked at the command to love God in this way? Have I ever made this my ideal and lived in harmony with it? It is certainly true that I cannot restrict it without weakening the sense even of the words of the command, which embrace everything in their generality and simplicity. Ah! my God! Up to the present I have not loved thee; I have not reproached myself for my want of love for thee; I have never even seriously examined myself on the observance of this, the first and greatest commandment! May I now, at last, begin—and may I continue even until my last breath.

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### ON THE SAME SUBJECT

#### FIRST POINT.

If the command to love God for the reasons and in the way we have been considering does not seem to me supremely just, I do not know God, I do not know myself, I do not think of what God is in himself,

of what he has done for me, of what he deserves from me. I do not think how God is, in my regard, my first Beginning and my last End, nor how strict is my obligation to love him on these two titles. If I consider myself as a human being, as a Christian; if I consult my reason or my faith; if I enter into myself or look around at that which is outside of me, all tells me that I ought to love God for himself, above all things and in all things; that no duty is so just as this, since he is even the Source of all justice. For nothing can be just, if this precept is not so, and there can be no moral principle, either natural or supernatural.

If the constraint of this precept seems to me too tiresome, it is because I listen to my blind or foolish passions, to my pride which aspires to independence, to my self-love which chooses to concentrate my affections on myself. But ought I to listen to these, ought I to take them for judges, when there is a question of the rights of God and of my obligations towards him? Nothing proves more fully the corruption of my nature, and how far it is removed from its original rectitude, than this repugnance I feel, this opposition to loving God, the violence I have to do to myself in order to surmount it; than the feeble and miserable reasons that I allege, if not entirely to dispense myself from this duty, at least to restrict it as much as possible and weaken the obligations to fulfil it. I complain that it constrains my liberty. But what is this? Would God leave to my liberty

freedom not to love him, or to love him only just as much as may please me? Can I possibly imagine such a thing? Does he fetter my liberty when he tells me to apply it to the sole use for which he gave it? This was that I should firmly engage my will (made for the love of Good) in adoration of the Supreme Good, subordinating all other loves to this, and never allowing it to stray: this is to rule, and not to constrain it; this is to make it further my perfection and my true happiness, and prevent me from making it an instrument to my degradation and misery.

#### SECOND POINT.

If there is any commandment which is directed to the perfection of my faculties, it is that I should love God: and, indeed, it is the only one that produces this effect. In what consists the greatness and nobleness of my understanding? In that it is capable of knowing God, who is the one Being that is infinite in every kind of perfection. But if my understanding is capable of grasping this, clearly my destiny is to do so: and it fulfils this and perfects itself in exercising its powers on this great Object, in which it ceaselessly discovers the more to admire, to praise and to lift it above itself in the ravishment of love, the more deeply it penetrates into the Abysses in God. How small and unworthy of attention do all objects appear to my understanding, when, raising my eyes from all these, I cast but a glance on him, as it were resting my sight which aches from the contemplation of

things that can last but a short while. What is the beauty of things created but a faint ray from the Supreme Beauty? It is only on account of some kind of reflexion of the Beauty of God that my soul cares to contemplate them even for a moment as a sort of recreation, and then returns eagerly to the inexhaustible Source of all beauty. How noble, how divine are the thoughts that the human mind draws from the contemplation of God! What clearness as well as depth of reason, what steadiness of principle combined with justice, and what certainty in conclusions is the result of applying the mind to judge of things as God judges, when it persuades itself to see things as he sees them and consults in all its judgments that Supreme Reason which is the only and true Light. What an extravagant philosophy is that which blinds the mind and leads it to deny or call in question the existence of God, of Providence, or of the necessity for a revealed religion! O my God! inspire me with a most lively horror of such foolish wisdom and those who profess it!

And in what does the nobility of the human heart consist? In that it is capable of loving the Sovereign Good, who alone is Infinite Good; in that its desires rise up to this, and can be satisfied with nothing less. Thus, it is created and destined to possess this Good and can only arrive at its possession by *love*. It will never be either perfect or happy until it possesses It; thus, it attains its bliss by love. If our faculties lower or raise themselves, become more limited or

larger according to the objects which occupy them, what must be the elevation and the breadth of a heart whose every affection is for God and which disdains to dwell upon anything less than God ! But how narrow, how low must the heart become that attaches itself to created things, and makes them the end and aim of its desires ! How well-ordered, pure and holy must be the heart which loves him who is essential Order, Purity and Holiness ! What peace must it possess, what joy, what plenitude ! And on the contrary, how vexed, soiled and guilty must the heart be which, giving itself up to creatures, plunges itself into disorder, impurity and crime ! The soul that loves God is necessarily beautiful and of great value in his Eyes: every day it beautifies itself more and more in his sight and in that of those who judge according to God, and becomes more worthy of esteem. The heart that does not love is hideous and contemptible, and the greater her natural qualities may be, so much the more deserving is she of horror and scorn. Such is God's judgement; and if the world should find such a heart lovable and estimable, it is because the world judges by appearances, and its judgement is vain and erroneous.

### THIRD POINT.

Besides these reasons for loving God, which are really personal and to my own interest, there are others, stronger and more pressing, which also refer to me. By fulfilling the precept to love God, I secure

my own eternal happiness. My feet stand every moment on the sill of the door of eternity, and it depends on God alone whether I enter it this instant. If I have his love in my heart, I am safe; if I have it not, I am hopelessly lost.

I do not know whether I am worthy of love or hatred; nor, consequently, whether I have sanctifying grace and charity to the degree that is necessary. To set my conscience at rest on this most important point, I ought to make as sure as possible that my will is right. And in what way can I assure myself of this but by at once consecrating my mind, my heart and my strength to the love of God? Alas! they who put off this duty until the last moment expose themselves to the danger of dying without having fulfilled it!

The degree of glory and happiness which will be mine in Heaven, will exactly correspond to the degree of love which I have had on earth. There will be great diversity of places in Heaven, and to each soul will be assigned his own in proportion to his degree of love. To say, as some tepid and careless people do, that they do not aspire to a high place but will be contented to be in the lowest, is not humility, but a way of speaking that is insupportable; an unpardonable way of thinking which shows that they do not set a very high value on the Kingdom of God and deserve to be excluded from it altogether.

In the next life, no merit can be gained; and we only take there so much as we have acquired here.



Heaven is open only to pure charity, in whatever degree. One of the principal objects of Purgatory is to purify this charity and to free it from all admixture of self-love. This purification is often very long; the Church in her prayers supposes that it may last for centuries; and this purification is achieved only by incomprehensible suffering by which charity is not in the least increased. When a Christian has good reason to presume that his salvation is secured by love, what folly it would be in him, not to labour with all his might to increase and purify his charity here below, and thus avoid the necessity of going to Purgatory at all and suffering the long and severe pains meted out to him by Divine Justice in punishment of his lukewarmness. And besides the fact that it will be very long before he reaches even that lowest place which he professes would satisfy him, what an unspeakable loss he would suffer, if he has the faith to consider and realize that he might have a much higher place if he would but grow and increase now in charity, which really depends upon himself alone.

## CONSIDERATION

### ON THE PRACTICE OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

One of the easiest, the sweetest and the most efficacious methods of sustaining and increasing our love to God is the constant practice of his holy Presence; and before we can begin to make use of this means,

we must have some little spark of the fire of his love in our hearts. For the sinner is afraid of the thought of God; in whom he sees only a terrible Judge who must condemn him. The lukewarm Christian avoids the thought of God who reproaches him with his tepidity and his continual resistance to grace. The dissipated Christian who is given up to things of sense and imagination and always occupied in mind with external things, will not admit a thought that would oblige him to enter into himself and withdraw from such things. But the Christian who determines seriously to belong to God and desires to love him sincerely, willingly thinks of him; he makes the thought of God his dearest occupation; he leaves it with regret, and always returns to it with pleasure. In a word, nothing is sweeter than to think of one we love, and above all when the Object of our thoughts is infinitely worthy of love and the heart finds in him all that can satisfy it.

This is an easy method. One who loves God is reminded of him by everything; he sees him in all creatures, who owe their life, their movement, their very existence to him alone. The grand spectacle of nature, whether considered in general or in each part in particular, becomes for him a kind of contemplation in which he is ravished with admiration of the divine perfections and transported with love in thinking that God, who has need of nothing, has made all this for man, and for him during the short time of this present life. If, he cries, if the place of

this present exile is so beautiful; if all this enchants me so that I am tempted to stop and fix my desires upon it, what will be the loveliness of my true fatherland, where I shall see and possess not only the passing beauty, but that which is eternal, immutable, and which necessarily draws all its infinite attractions from his own Essence, the Being of God?

The minds of the saints have been, as it were, drowned in this thought; and whatever meets their sight that is beautiful, good, or magnificent on earth, raises their hearts to heaven. They find such ease in the thought of God and occupying themselves with his Presence, that they cannot understand how it is that people are absorbed in other things. Now, how did they attain to this happy state of mind? Love had drawn them to the thought of God; it had taught them to seek and find him everywhere; and that assiduous exercise of the Presence of God, which they made at first a determined resolution to practise, gave by degrees an incredible strength and growth to their love. This exercise became so familiar to them, that they practised it without thinking of it, and so necessary that they could not live without it; and it had gradually become almost impossible for them to distract their minds from the thought.

The presence of God is still more useful to those who carefully practise recollection, and retire into their own hearts to study their movements. Such a one has no need of outward objects to suggest or

inspire the thought of God; he finds God within himself and bears him about with him everywhere. In fact, if I consider ever so little, I have only to ask myself, What is it that I wish to know? What does my mind most crave after? The answer is, *the Truth*; and the Truth is God. What does my heart desire? Happiness; and happiness lies in the possession of God. And in order to know God, without considering created things, I have only to study him in himself, to fix the eye of my understanding on his Nature and his Perfections; to dive a little into those ideas of order, of wisdom, beauty, goodness, justice, of eternity, immensity, of the infinite in any way, which are my first notions, essential to my reason and indelible, the notions on which I judge or reason without fear of deceiving myself, the notions to which I must recall all, unless I wish to err; and I shall find that these fundamental notions come to me from God, that they owe their origin to God, that they are, indeed, God himself. Behold now, God intimately and inseparably present to my mind. If I lose the remembrance of him, the reason is that I forget myself and what I am. He is even more present to my heart which never loses its desire after happiness, and to which he is necessary, since he is its life. To wish for anything is to aspire after it in order to be united with and enjoy it. If God is true and essential happiness, as we cannot doubt, behold then my heart ever desiring God, desiring him naturally and necessarily, aspiring only to be united with and to

enjoy him. And if I wish it, will not the direct and necessary object of my desires be always present with me? In order to secure this, all I have to do is to keep my eyes fixed on him and never turn them away. By these frequent turnings of the mind and heart to God, love is strengthened and grows more and more.

And there is no more efficacious method in itself than to live in the Presence of God; this we can do without interruption, nothing being able to prevent my mind and heart from being occupied with him. Besides, that which we do often, cannot fail in time to produce a considerable effect, and the more we think of such an Object as God, the more lovable we find him; the more we love, the more we wish to love. The practice of the Presence of God, being an exercise of love, what other effect can it have than that of making love grow? The Good God on his side seeing a soul wish to have him always present, doing all that depends on her for this end, and reproaching herself for the least voluntary dissipation, is pleased by her fidelity: he redoubles his graces, he visits her frequently and delights in making his Presence felt; not only is she in his Presence, but she tastes it and finds its ineffable sweetness; he enters into familiar intercourse with her, and gradually admits her to an intimate union. If we did but know what this union means, what would we not do in order to enjoy it! What we read in the lives of the saints, even what they have written about it them-



selves, is nothing in comparison to that which they have experienced.

It is sometimes said that this practice of the Presence of God is impossible. In the heart it is certainly not impossible, and it is this sort of practice that God chiefly asks of us. Whether I actually reflect always on the person I love best, or do not, I always love him really. In the mind it is certainly not impossible either, if properly understood. Is it not often said that a faithful wife is always thinking of her husband, a mother of her only son, a friend of his favourite friend? Does that mean that they never think of anything else? Not at all. It means that they think very often of these dear ones, that they think of them willingly, and the thought of other people and other things is no detriment to this. To think of God in the same way is the easiest and most natural thing possible; and so much the more because we ought to think of everything else only because of him and in reference to him. When, according to God's order, I think of other things and have no other intention in doing so than because it is his Will, or when I give some relaxation to my mind, because it cannot strain its attention too far, I still think of God and keep myself in his holy Presence. As to useless, vain and wandering thoughts which present themselves to the imagination even in the times of prayer; and those which are the result of our want of calmness, our fears or hurry; if they are involuntary they do not distract us from the Presence of God; but if they become the



occasion of wanderings of the mind, or immortification of heart, we must go to the root of the evil and little by little retrench all that puts an obstacle to the continuity of the Presence of God. The saints have arrived at this point. We shall succeed in doing so also, if we only *will* it, as they did.

# THIRD DAY

## *ON SOME PARTICULAR MOTIVES FOR LOVING GOD*

### FIRST MEDITATION

#### ON GOD AS OUR FATHER

#### FIRST POINT.

God is our Father; in all nature there is no title that gives a better right to be loved than does that of Father. But how is God our Father? In a way that can only belong to him. He is the Creator of my body and of my soul and is the author of their union. It is from him alone that I have received my faculties and natural qualities, such as I possess. He is my Father, and it is by him alone that I continue every instant to exist. He is my Father and continually supplies my needs, my comforts, and even my pleasures; for, even if I should take these against his Will, still no one else has provided them. He could in a moment withdraw all he has given me, if I should offend him by abusing his goodness. He could reduce me to nothing, and it is of his pure goodness that he does not annihilate me. What are other fathers compared with him? If by nature children have the sacred and indispensable duty of

loving their father, how much more am I obliged to love God !

But faith teaches me that God is my Father by a much more excellent title than that of creation merely. Creation is in the purely natural order; whilst there is another far above nature. Reason shows us the right to the title on the first grounds, but the second is a mystery which surpasses our intelligence. God is my Father in that he has adopted me in Jesus Christ his Only Son. The title of Father characterizes the First Person of the Adorable Trinity in that he has begotten that Son from all eternity, one in substance with himself, and in all equal to himself. As he could not in this manner be my Father, because this would be contrary to his Nature and to mine, by a marvellous invention of his Love and in order to make himself my Father as far as possible, he has united the human nature which is ours inseparably to the Person of his Son, and in this way has adopted in him, all of us who belong to this Son, as Christians. He is my Father by Grace, as he is that of Jesus Christ by Nature; he sees me, he loves me in Jesus Christ as his son, and in a certain proportion I become the object of his good pleasure as in Jesus Christ. By the Incarnation he has found the ineffable secret of extending even to me the Divine Sonship, and to share with me the infinite tenderness which he has for him. This adoption brings me so near to God, and is so eminent a benefit, that if the angels could be jealous, they would envy me ! What love do I

not owe to God, in gratitude for this his quality of Fatherhood, which he has deigned to extend so far as to *me* ! To understand how far my gratitude and love ought to go, I must try to conceive the excess of love which God has shown in thus adopting me. In precisely the same way as the Love of the Eternal Word for his Father has passed into the soul of Jesus, and has been communicated to It as much as It was capable of containing it; in the same way must the Love of Jesus Christ pass from his Soul into mine and fill it, according to the capacity of my soul to contain that Love.

#### SECOND POINT.

The rights which come to me from God with the title of *adopted child*, are so many reasons for making me love him more. In the first place, I enter by adoption into the family of God and make part of it. Jesus Christ is the Firstborn and the Head; I, as member of Jesus Christ and his brother by adoption, am incorporated into that family and belong to the household of God, not in quality of a servant, but in quality of a child. That which cannot be said of the angels, can be said of me; that I am one of the children of God, and this is a very important point in my belief. I have thus the right that Jesus Christ has to the familiarity of God, and to live in his House on the footing of a child. Jesus Christ has made no distinction in this between himself and us; he said: "My God and your God: my Father and your Father."<sup>1</sup> In the

<sup>1</sup> St John xx 17.

second place, by my title of his child I have a right to special tenderness, to attentions and care on the part of my Father, who has even a mother's consideration for me, who takes an interest in me in a particular manner, who lavishes on me his affection and caresses, who lives, so to speak, in me, who shares my pains and pleasures, who only thinks of making me happy and finds his glory in doing so. On my part, I have only to behave like his child and I shall experience a goodness on his part, with which the best and most generous of earthly parents cannot compare. However disobedient, ungrateful or unnatural I am, or have been, if I will but consider a little what God has done and is even now doing for me, I shall be penetrated with admiration and gratitude for his tenderness and paternal care! The picture drawn for us by Jesus Christ himself of the reception given to the repentant prodigal by his father, is but a feeble representation of the goodness of the Heavenly Father towards sinners. And if he is thus loving to those who offend him, what must he be to such as are obedient and faithful! Whether he has received me back to his grace after I have sinned, or whether he has preserved me from falling into any mortal sin; by what love can I return that Love of his suitably, which he has thus shown me, and that title of Father by which he is engaged to love me? For he has willed to make this Love of his for me an obligation to which he has been pleased to bind himself, so that he cannot refuse it to me. And, in the third

and last place, I have an acquired and assured right to the celestial heritage: it cannot fail to be mine, unless I choose to disinherit myself by my wilful obstinacy. Faith guarantees this right to be mine, as infallibly as it guarantees that God is my Father. There is no other way by which I can be deprived of it (unless by my own fault), except that God should cast away his title of Father, which is an absolute impossibility and can never be. And what is this heritage to which my right is so well founded? It is even the possession of God himself. It is a joy suited, indeed, to my capacity, but in itself the very same that God himself enjoys. It is his own happiness which becomes mine: and in order to communicate it to me, he will unite me to himself, he will absorb me, so that I shall be lost in him. I ought to enjoy this inheritance eternally, unchangeably, with the most firm assurance that it will never be taken away from me, that no one can ever trouble or disturb it, nor dispute with me the possession of it. My ingratitude would be monstrous if I should not love such a Father with my whole heart, every moment of my life; for he gives me rights over all he has, over all he is, and associates me with all his glory and all his felicity.

### THIRD POINT.

This title of *Child of God* can never be lost. In whatever way I may behave with regard to him, whatever my feelings towards him may be, it will always be true that he is my Father. In my indelible char-



acter of his adopted child I shall always read my indispensable obligation to love God; and there I shall read my condemnation if I do not love him. This name will be one great subject of my joy in heaven. God, infinitely worthy of love in himself, will seem to me, if I may dare to say so, still more lovable regarded in his quality of Father, which will authorize me to congratulate him more lovingly and to congratulate myself on his Perfections, looking on them as if they were my own, in virtue of the bond and union which exist between a child and its parent. This same title will be in hell, if I have the misery to fall into it, and that name will be the source of my most frightful sufferings, of the bitter reproaches that I shall make eternally to myself for not having loved my Father as I ought to have loved such a Father, and of the terrible despair in which I shall be plunged for not having loved him. Ah ! if I knew *how* worthy of love the celestial Father is, and all the claims he has on my heart, in the fulness with which the damned in hell know them, with what violence should I not force myself to love him ! The suffering of these wretched souls consists in being obliged for ever to resist the violence of this attraction with all the force of their will: my crime lies in resisting it voluntarily. They always recognize God as their Father; they *will* not to love him; and they cannot love anything else. What a horrible state to be in ! If I meditate upon it, it will not teach me less how much I ought to love God as my Father now, than medita-

tion does on the state of the Blessed in Heaven, since love rejoicing will make the bliss of the one, and love despairing will be the misery of the other.

## SECOND MEDITATION

### ON THE GIFT WHICH GOD THE FATHER HAS MADE TO ME OF HIS OWN SON

#### FIRST POINT.

Not content with having adopted me as his child, God has gone further and has even given me his own Son. Could he have given me a greater gift, or given me proof of a greater love? "He," says St Paul, "that spared not even his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath he not also with him given us all things?"<sup>1</sup> If it had been left to me to choose and ask of God any proof of his love, should I ever have dreamt of asking so great a one? and even if I had thought of it, should I ever have dared to ask it? There is no need to say more on the point. Reason is overwhelmed, and the tongue cannot find words to express what the heart feels. Nothing is left for me to do but to annihilate myself before God, and beg him to glorify himself on account of this unspeakable gift. The only way in which we can make any return to him, is humbly to confess our powerlessness to give him the love and thanks

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii 32.

he deserves. The least we ought to do is, to give ourselves and all that is ours to the Divine Father, who has given us his Only Son. But what is the gift of all that we have? What is the gift of ourselves? What is the utmost love of which a creature is capable, as an acknowledgement of such a supreme effort of the Love of God? All this is only what is due to him on so many accounts; and what have I, that I can add further in return for the unspeakable gift that surpasses all the others?

## SECOND POINT.

Consider the circumstances under which God has given us his Son! This is a point to which we must pay attention, because it greatly adds to the value of the gift. He gave me that Son, when I was his enemy, worthy of eternal disgrace and of his curse. Not only was there no plea in my favour to render me worthy of it, but there was everything to deter God from granting it to me. His love alone pleaded in my favour and obtained the Gift. "God commendeth his charity towards us; because, when as yet we were sinners, according to the time, Christ died for us."<sup>1</sup> Not only did God see in me the stains of original sin, but he saw also all those actual sins of which I should make myself personally guilty, even after he had made the gift to me of his dear Son and in face of it! And the sight of all this, which, it seems,

<sup>1</sup> Rom. v 8.

should have aroused his anger, was not able to hinder the outpouring of his Love.

Why has he given me his Son? To restore me (and more than before) to a state of grace; to re-establish me even more advantageously in the rights which I had forfeited; to look upon me only as upon his Son, the sole object of his good pleasure, and to extend the infinite Love which he has for his Son, even to me. All this is unquestionably matter of faith, and I profess to believe it; but does it incline my heart to love him the more? O God! how is it that I have been able to bear this contradiction between my faith and my affection so long? How shall I be able to bear it when I shall have to appear before thee? Indeed, these truths have only been put before me to engage my love; and the more firmly I believe them, the more ardently I ought to love.

### THIRD POINT.

How has the Father given me his Son? Ah! here is the triumph of Divine Love. In sacrificing him for me, in immolating him to justice, in my place; in discharging on this beloved One all the weight of his vengeance in order to show mercy to me who was his enemy; in treating him as a criminal in order to efface my crimes and render me just in his sight; in looking upon him as an object worthy of hatred and malediction, in order to pour his Blessings on me, in time and in eternity.

The command God gave to Abraham, in old

time, to sacrifice his only and much-loved child, seems cruel to us. We easily agree that God is master of life and death. But to put the knife into the hand of a father to slay his own son, arouses horror in both mind and heart. This sacrifice of Abraham which was not carried out in effect, was but the shadow of the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon Calvary, which was accomplished by the Hand of his Father. How dearly it must have cost the Love of this Father, to treat his only Son thus ! But his love for us carried him even to this excess. If the thought of this Sacrifice confounds our reason, far more ought it to melt our heart and make it succumb under the weight of love and gratitude. Ah ! if we meditate on this, not lightly and in a passing way, but deeply and at our leisure ! If we entreat God to enlighten us on such high truths, and then to penetrate our souls with the feelings they ought to inspire ! And is not this just what he wishes and is always ready to do ? Whom can we blame but ourselves, if he does it not ?

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### ON THE SAME GIFT OF GOD TO US

##### FIRST POINT.

In consideration of his Only Son, who has become my Brother, God pours profusely upon me all the graces necessary to my sanctification, and, consequently, all the graces necessary to my present and

future happiness; graces general and common to all Christians; graces particular and personal; habitual and actual grace; and specially that great grace of prayer, which is always at my disposition, and with which, if I make good use of it, I am assured of obtaining all the others, even that of final perseverance. These graces are so linked together, that by my fidelity to correspond with them, they will grow and increase every day, both in number and in efficacy, in such a way that they will render the practice of virtue easy, natural and sweet to me, and make my return to imperfections almost impossible; and this must be understood of even the lightest fault, provided it be committed with deliberate purpose. Such graces as pursue me everywhere, and will not be repulsed by my long and obstinate resistance, which are not afraid of being too importunate and troublesome to my false security: graces which only abandon the greatest sinners at the last moment, when their hardened impenitence becomes hopeless.

It is right that here I should pause to recall as far as I can the principal graces I have received from God since my infancy, and spend some time in doing so. For, as to the graces I receive daily, it is not possible for me to count them all; and how many does God offer me, to which I pay no attention! No single one, of all these graces, but is a pressing motive to make me love God, for all are bought with the price of the Blood of Jesus Christ. What feelings of astonishment, of gratitude and of love, should



they not excite in me, if I consider them all together ? And what love would now be mine if by my correspondence I had allowed them to multiply infinitely ! This was the intention of God: my lack of fidelity does not diminish his liberality, and ought not to lessen my gratitude.

## SECOND POINT.

Consider that, through the merits of his Only-Begotten Son, God has many times preserved you from falling into hell, although you have often deserved it. Being Master of your life as he is, and often and justly irritated against you, he might have cast you into the gulf of hopeless misery at any instant when in mortal sin. How many such sins have you committed ? How long a time have you spent in that state ? This probably you cannot reckon. The angels only sinned once; God did not wait for their repentance; he gave them no time nor place for repentance, but punished their rebellion instantly and without mercy. He could have treated me in the same way; what is it that stayed the Arm of his Justice ? It is the Blood of Jesus Christ. It is literally true that God has shown you as great, or even greater goodness by preserving you from falling into hell, than he would exercise towards a lost soul or a devil, if he were to draw him out of hell, leaving him afterwards free to expose himself to the danger of it again by sin. What would be the love of such a soul, what the gratitude ! Yet you owe no less

to God for every single time that he has suspended the punishment due to your sin, or, rather, to your countless sins !

There are at this moment in hell many lost souls who have sinned less grievously than you have done. They have no reason to complain (nor do they complain) against Divine Justice. Heaven is still open to you and your lot lies in your own hands. How ungrateful would you be if you were not to bless God continually for his mercy and if you would not be moved to love him by such an urgent reason.

If, on the other hand, you have reason to believe that you have preserved your baptismal innocence and have never done anything that would deserve hell, then you are even deeper in debt to the Divine Goodness and more obliged to love God, since, in consideration of your corrupt nature and inclinations, your weakness, the strength of temptations, the multitude of occasions, the seduction of evil examples and conversations, it is certain that you would have fallen into grave sin, and more than once, if God had not watched especially over you and had either sheltered you from danger, or had, when you were in danger, given you the help of his powerful Hand to sustain you.

### THIRD POINT.

God has not only forgiven me, as often as I have offended him, for the sake of his Only Son, when I have returned to him again; but he has forgotten—

blotted out—my sins, and has “cast them to the bottom of the sea.”<sup>1</sup> And more still, he is *always* ready to forgive and to forget when I sin again. Neither the number, nor the greatness, nor the frequency of my relapses, can weary his Patience or exhaust his Mercy, provided only that I am sincerely sorry for having offended him, and firmly resolved never to grieve him again. What father could be found to have such dispositions towards his son? And if, after a great number of faults repeatedly committed, he should always be ready to take the child back into his good graces, would he not be accused of showing too much indulgence, and might it not be said with reason that he authorized his son to offend and to abuse so much goodness? Love, if I may dare to say so, love has put our Heavenly Father above such accusations and reproaches as have sometimes been made against him by the first, on account of the abuse of his Mercy which obstinate sinners make (and which I, myself, have made) by boldly offending him, persevering obstinately in my sins, in the assurance that he will grant forgiveness whenever I ask it. That which makes it all the more wonderful is that, although I can wander away from God by the exercise of my free will, yet I cannot return without his help. His graces must prevent and attract me, he has to seek me, he runs after me, he calls me back, and, by an efficacious grace, he stops my erring feet and draws me again to him. Without this, my wander-

<sup>1</sup> Mich. vii 19.

ings would lead me on and on, so far from him that I could never return. Has he not acted thus with me countless times? And my heart must be hard indeed, if it is not softened by such an excess of paternal goodness on his part. Three things are incomprehensible in God:

1. His longsuffering in bearing with our offences;
2. His willingness to grant us pardon for them; and
3. His readiness to stretch out his Hand, and lift us up after our falls.

No love on our part, no gratitude that we can possibly return, will ever equal this!

## CONSIDERATION

### ON MEDITATION ON GOD'S BENEFITS TO US

If there is one way more powerful than another of bringing the love of God to life in our hearts, of feeding and making it grow, undoubtedly it is that of meditating on his Blessings to us. We are surrounded by them; those showered upon us in the order of nature are immense, continual and numberless; but incomparably greater, though equally numberless and continual, are those in the order of grace. Our sweetest and most welcome occupation ought to be that of constantly recalling the remembrance of them, of diving into and meditating upon them.

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This subject is inexhaustible, containing only that which consoles and melts the heart; it is within the range of everyone, and does not need any great effort of the mind. In Holy Scripture we find clearly, and in a thousand places, that God's intention is that we should dwell more often on the thoughts of his benefits than on anything else, and never lose sight of them. He invites us to do so, even commanding it, for his own glory and our advantage, and attaches infinite graces to the frequent practice. And we, ungrateful, dull and hardhearted that we are, we enjoy all the blessings given by God our Creator, by God our Saviour, and scarcely bring ourselves to reflect upon them at all or to show him the smallest gratitude ! We are ready enough to pray when we want to ask for anything; we seldom or never think of praying to thank and glorify him for all he has given !

Would it be too much to devote half an hour, or at least a quarter, daily to meditation on the blessings God has given and now gives us, to return thanks for them, and arouse within ourselves the feelings of gratitude and love which they deserve ? Oh, how much the better should we be for doing this, and the love of God increase and grow wonderfully in our souls ! There are many Christians who, being condemned by the condition of their lives to constant toil, are prevented from giving a consecutive time to this holy exercise; if these are careful to recall God's blessings to them and think of and thank him for them at short intervals, only giving more time on the days set apart

for his service, he will ask no more than this from them. But rich people who have leisure and the disposition of their own time, whose minds are more cultivated and who have had a better education, who have no lack of good and edifying books, or could get them if they chose, are not these inexcusable if they do not regularly every day employ their time and their minds to some devout meditation, or such reading as will excite a lively sense of the benefits of God? Riches have their dangers and inconveniences, but they also bring advantages for salvation and sanctity; and certainly one of the greatest of these is that they procure leisure and liberty to their possessors to occupy themselves with religion and generally furnish such an education as greatly facilitates and disposes to the gaining of spiritual fruit. Those who have received such advantages and facilities will have to render an account to God who gave them, of the use they have made of these gifts. He will ask them why they have scarcely ever thought of his benefits? Why, he will say, why have not the mysteries of my religion been diligently pondered and kept in your mind? Why have you not reflected on the many personal graces of which your whole life has been a tissue? You have had plenty of time; I arranged your life so that you should have time to think of me and all my benefits. But you preferred to spend your time in visits, plays and entertainments, with all kinds of frivolous amusements. Your mind was cultivated and was not lacking penetration, and you had means



and opportunities of meditating, of reading and hearing good books. You preferred to give your attention to science and the profane arts, and often to subjects either dangerous or childish. What will they answer to this? What shall I, myself, answer? For I have, more or less, deserved these reproaches, and could have given much more time to the things of God than I have devoted to them. How many hours I have wasted, not knowing what to do with them, or when I sought for some vain pastime, instead of occupying my mind with the most interesting Object of all—the only Object worthy of it !

Forgive me the past, O God, and strengthen me in the resolution I now make for the rest of my life to spend much more time in the consideration of the Blessings thou givest me, and how to use them to my advancement in the love of Thee.

## FOURTH DAY

### ON THE ADVANTAGES OF THE WAY OF LOVE

#### FIRST MEDITATION

##### ON THE THREE WAYS: OF FEAR, OF HOPE, AND OF LOVE

##### FIRST POINT.

If a Christian is living in a state of grace, as he is obliged to be, and it depends upon himself to secure this; and if charity holds the first place in his heart which it ought, above all the other virtues; there are three ways by which he can walk in the service of God and attain to salvation. The first way is that of *Fear*; the second, that of *Hope*; and the third, that of *Love*. Not that any one of the three excludes the others absolutely, but each is named according to its chief characteristic; otherwise the two first would not be good, since charity would have no place, and the third way would be contrary to the principles of faith and to our present state as pilgrims—at least in so far as it would exclude *hope*. But in the first way, the motive of Fear is that generally in action and makes the strongest impression; in the same manner in the second, the motive of Hope; and in the third that of

Love. In the beginning at least, no one is left to his own choice as to which way is the best for him to follow. There are some souls whom God leads first by fear, others whom he attracts to himself by hope, and others whom he draws by the attachment of love. But his intention is, that as the soul progresses, love shall always gain the upper place; and so he moderates and even banishes fear, by love; so he ennobles and purifies hope. Thus he disposes the soul little by little in the way of love, provided it is faithful; and the duty of every Christian is to second and foster the operation of grace on this point, which tends to make him constantly advance towards the fulfilling the great commandment of God.

## SECOND POINT.

Souls led by the way of fear are strongly impressed by the thought of the strictness of God's judgements, the sufferings of hell, and all the terrifying truths of religion. God makes use of fear to arrest the vehemence of the passions, to counterbalance the seductive attraction of the things of sense, to arm the soul against dangerous occasions, and to be as a preventive bridle in the pressure of violent temptations. Fear is equally of service either to preserve us in temptation or to keep us from evil; either to prevent the contraction of bad habits or for their cure. It is most useful for Christians in the time of youth, and often even most necessary.

But it usually happens that souls led by fear will

go beyond the limits set by God; will find pleasure in indulging it; they will by preference meditate on it or read by choice of such subjects as are likely to increase it; in short, they want to remain stationary in the way of fear. It is very difficult sometimes for them to consent to leave it when God asks it of them, and when it does more harm than good for their advancement. Now this is a great snare. Have I fallen into it? Or must I not be well on my guard against it if I follow my own character and imagination?

Fear is more powerful to withdraw from evil, than to attract and lead to good; and yet it is not less necessary for a Christian to do the one than the other. If fear moves to the practice of anything good, it is only to such as is strict and narrow; it never goes further, nor can it, because it closes the heart, never proposing such virtues as are amiable or attractive and animating the soul by no motives capable of making it overcome difficulties with joy and courage. It is possible to be saved with fear, but such a soul will never become a saint, and this is a serious disadvantage. Have I allowed myself to be subject to this, and does it hold me back in my progress in virtue?

Fear never in any way sweetens or lightens the yoke of Christ; it lets the soul feel the whole weight of the burden. For this reason it deters the soul from taking upon itself anything more than it thinks is absolutely indispensable, and, measuring its duties

by its strength—which is very little—it diminishes them as much as ever it can; it bargains with God and only gives to him that which it cannot possibly refuse. There is no sweetness, no consolation, no encouragement for the soul in this state; the joy of the Holy Spirit is unknown to it; it is sad, morose, weary, restless, cast down at every step it takes, often exposed to the temptation to give up everything good. This is the third disadvantage with respect to fear, and may lead to even more fatal consequences. Have I not known, perhaps for a long while, what it is to let fear reign in my soul?

Finally, a soul under the dominion of fear is led to live under the empire of self-love, which, though in its beginning it is supernatural, makes almost everything natural and selfish in its application; making us look upon the great truths of religion solely with regard to ourselves and to our own personal interest in such a way that holy fear degenerates into servile fear which has less horror of sin, than it has for the chastisement that follows; and which thinks less of the offence against God, than of the eternal punishment which results for ourselves. Fear would be manifestly bad and incompatible with charity, if the apprehension of punishment were the only motive deterring us from sin. This is the precipice down which some souls are cast by fear when under the dominion of self-love. May God preserve us from this, the greatest and worst danger of excessive fear.

## THIRD POINT.

Christian Hope has great advantages over fear. Hope lifts up the heart and animates it to the practice of virtue, encouraging it to overcome difficulties in view of the reward, and even draws the soul to do and suffer great things in order to deserve and increase this recompense. All this, no doubt, is quite good; and it is not in vain that God, knowing our weakness and disinclination to virtue, permits us to be excited and sustained by the hope of the greatness of the Prize awaiting us at the end of our struggles.

But as we are, naturally, interested, it is to be feared that the soul led by the way of Hope will be inclined to act too much from that motive, in a manner that would be prejudicial to love. It is, in fact, exposed to the danger of becoming mercenary, in fixing its eyes rather on its own reward than on the Goodness of God in engaging to give it to us. It then thinks less of pleasing God than of acquiring merit; it reckons—so to say—with him, and puts a price on its services. It is liable to vainglory about the works it performs, and particularly those which are not strictly obligatory in order to gain Heaven; in some way to set a value on itself in God's sight for its generosity and fidelity; to trust more to its own good works than to the merits of Jesus Christ; and to presume that, after all it has done and suffered, the reward is won. And further, self-love turns to its own interests even the eternal possession of God,



considering that possession less with regard to God who will glorify himself in it, than with regard to its own happiness. In a word, what it loves in the celestial joys of heaven is more its own satisfaction and pleasure, than the good pleasure of God. I would wish, indeed, that in all this there may be no essential detriment to charity, but, nevertheless, it unquestionably weakens it and soils its purity, and there is much imperfection in occupying oneself so much more with one's own gain and interest than with that of God. If up to the present time, the thought of the reward has been the most powerful motive with me, I must examine myself in the Presence of God as to whether I have not many of those imperfections which we have been considering, and ought to work diligently to purify myself by turning all my attention to love and giving this motive the first place, as indeed it deserves. The two meditations that now follow will convince me of the preference I ought to give to the Way of Love.

## SECOND MEDITATION ON THE SAME SUBJECT

### FIRST POINT.

Love knows no other fear, habitually, except filial fear, that is to say, the fear of offending God because he is loved as our Father. This kind of fear being

the daughter of love, is attentive and delicate in quite a different way from the fear of God's justice and his punishments. It leads the soul to avoid the lightest faults, the smallest imperfections that are voluntary. Instead of freezing and closing the heart, it warms and enlarges it. This fear does not cause any alarm or trouble; and, even when the soul has fallen into some fault, filial fear leads it back sweetly to God by peaceful and sincere repentance, seeking promptly and abundantly to appease him and make up for the pain which has been given to so good a Father. But beyond that, the soul does not lose its tranquillity and still holds fast its confidence.

Love guards Hope from whatever mercenary views self-love might mingle and soil it with. One who loves does not know what it is to bargain with God, nor to do good works principally with an eye to the merit that may be gained by them; and, by this noble disinterestedness it merits incomparably more. Forgetting all that he has already done for God, he only thinks of how he can do more; he does not praise himself for anything as if it were his own doing; he considers the future reward, not in the light of a recompense that he has deserved, but as a pledge of loving God with all his strength for all eternity and of being loved by him again.

Such is the point of view from which he considers happiness; more from the side of God's good pleasure and the glory which might accrue to him, than from the side of his own interest. He never excludes hope.

How could he possibly shut hope out of his soul, since he loves God, and, as he cannot fully possess him in this life, he hopes to do so in heaven and never to be separated from him? But he puts the Will of God above his own enjoyment of God. And when love is at its highest point of perfection it is ready to sacrifice its own happiness to the Will of God, if he should ask that sacrifice; or, rather, love puts its happiness in the accomplishment of the Will of its Best Beloved. This must not be regarded as a mere vain imagination or unpractical fancy. Many saints are known certainly to have been put to this trial, and how many more of whom we are ignorant may not also have experienced it? It is also certain that all the Blessed are in these dispositions, and that unless they had been, they could not have entered Heaven. So it follows that love must be purified to this degree, either in this world, or in the other by the pains of Purgatory. Is there any question which to choose? And, when we consider it, if the way of love had no other advantage than that of exempting us from Purgatory, or greatly shortening its duration, could we hesitate in our decision?

#### SECOND POINT.

To serve God by love is the most simple way, since it reduces all to one single motive which dominates every other, or in which all others are comprised. If I love God, I fear him with the kind of fear that is most pleasing to him and most useful for me. If I

love God, I hope in his promises with the firmest confidence, and I ensure their fulfilment, as far as is possible in this world. If I love God, I have no need to think about the acquisition of each virtue in particular; the exercise of love includes each and all of them, and makes us practise them by the motive of love itself in a higher and more perfect way than if I were to exercise each one by the motive peculiar to that virtue. Love dispenses me from that crowd of methods and practices, which the greater number of people seek after so eagerly that they are continually changing; attaching themselves today to this and tomorrow to that, and in the end they embarrass themselves with so many, which serve to disturb their peace and retard their progress in the way of holiness. Love has only one method, and that is, to follow the instinct of grace which leads us to love; it has only one practice, which is, to love at all times, in all places, and in every situation; it has only one act, to which every other refers, only one motive, loving because it loves; it has only one end, loving in order to love. What can be more simple? But is there any means of perfection that this simplicity does not embrace? Is there any that it does not use and employ excellently, drawing from it more profit than if it stopped at that single means considered in itself? The simplicity of the way of love draws the soul near to the state of the Blessed, who see God but to love him. If love adds hope to love, it is because the soul does not yet possess God as the Blessed do. What shall

I say more? This simplicity makes the soul approach even to the state of God who only knows himself in order to love himself, and in whom love is the object of all the Divine acts.

### THIRD POINT.

To serve God by love is the sweetest way. It attracts our hearts, for the heart is made to love. It draws the will, very gently but very efficaciously, to do what God asks of it. Love puts the heart perfectly at ease, which no other sentiment is able to do. Fear constrains; hope is not without a shadow of disquiet; but love knows neither the torments of fear nor the alarms to which hope, left to itself, is subject. Love inspires joy, which St Paul calls the second fruit of the Holy Spirit, putting charity—or love—first.<sup>1</sup>

And what a joy that is ! pure, internal, unchangeable ! a joy that is a foretaste of that of the blessed ! Love maintains the soul in peace, which the Apostle ranks next after joy: love never makes trouble. Trouble, in the soul, has three causes: either a bad conscience, or self-love, or the devil. Love keeps the conscience in a good state; it labours ceaselessly to destroy self-love; it scorns the black suggestions of the devil; it resists and triumphs over them. God is Peace itself; and as God can only be possessed here below by love, love is necessarily the sole means of rejoicing in peace.

<sup>1</sup> *Vide Gal. v 22.*

This way, which is at once the simplest and the sweetest, is also the easiest. If there is one disposition which facilitates the practice of virtue, unquestionably it is that of love, whose nature is noble, strong and generous, to whom nothing costs overmuch or, indeed, anything, when it is to please the object beloved, and which is ready to suffer to any extent rather than to displease or grieve him. If love that has its source in nature and which is inspired by passion can make a man capable of the greatest efforts on behalf of a father, a husband, or a person who has gained his heart, what may not be expected of supernatural love, which has for its Object a Being infinitely worthy of love, which is kindled in the heart of God himself, fortified with all the power of his grace, and animated by every motive that can touch the heart? We do willingly what we love, and easily overcome the disinclinations of nature when we love. Love either closes the eyes to difficulties, or smooths them away; it triumphs over obstacles, casts dangers on one side, and sacrifices its dearest interests, because love makes the soul forget self-love and only cares for or seeks to do that which the imperious instinct of love commands or wishes.

“Love,” says St Augustine, “feels no pain, or if it feels it, the very pain rejoices it, for it knows well that there is no better test of its sincerity than times of trial, and that such times afford grand opportunities of self-sacrifice.” Love, lastly, makes



us capable of everything and refuses to believe anything impossible.

I have loved, O God, in the past I have often loved, both people and things, other than thee: and I have found that when I love I can do easily and gladly that which would have been very hard and disagreeable if I had not loved! Why, then, should I allow myself to be frightened and draw back when thou hast put me to any trial for thy sake? Thy love should surely not have less power over me than that of a miserable creature! Art thou less attractive? Dost thou deserve less? Should I find less satisfaction in pleasing thee? And, if I must consult my own interest, is it possible that I believe that any other love can make me so happy as thine?

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### ON THE SAME SUBJECT

##### FIRST POINT.

Love, by its determination to avoid all evil and to do all possible good, secures perfect liberty to the heart and mind. We would hardly believe what seems paradoxical, but it is perfectly true that the only way to be quite free, is to allow ourselves to be taken captive by love, and know no other law than the Law of the good pleasure of God. Nothing, in fact, is truer. Is not God supremely free? Nevertheless

he of necessity hates evil, and, equally necessarily, he loves good. The nearer that through love I shall draw to the same dispositions that are his, the nearer I shall be to enjoying freedom like his; I shall love what he loves, and hate what he hates; his Will will be mine, and the less I try to escape from his Will, the less I shall be enslaved. And whose slave would I be? The slave of the devil, of the world, of my pride, my self-love, of my passions, my senses, of my imagination, of every object to which I should attach myself. These are the bonds, these are the servitudes from which love frees me at one blow. It makes me depend upon God alone, independent of all else, and, as far as I can and ought to be, it renders me the master of my very self.

From what source do most of those troubles of conscience come which many people suffer? Very often, because, since they love God too little, they refuse him what he asks from them; because, when urged by grace, they make him many promises and take many resolutions, but do not keep them. Whence it follows that, if they try to enter into themselves, they are harassed by interior reproaches which pursue them everywhere. How many doubts, perplexities, and anxieties trouble souls who try to make grace agree with nature, and the love of God accord with love of self! It is impossible to remain in this troubled state, but, in order to escape from it, there are two extreme measures to choose between. The one is, to give up the pursuit of perfection altogether,

to throw oneself into dissipation, and set aside all serious reflection on the state of one's soul; the other is to consecrate oneself unreservedly to the love of God, and bind oneself to follow him whithersoever he shall lead. Is there room for deliberation which course to choose? It is an unfailing experience that from the moment when we give ourselves up to the government of love, all doubts, anxieties, well-founded scruples, and even those which are purely imaginary, fall away from the soul; the reproaches of conscience cease, and the soul enjoys an admirable calm and tranquillity.

Love is the great tranquillizer for all who, being truly pious, are yet timorous as to their interior dispositions. It teaches them not to enquire too curiously as to their own progress, how they stand with God, and whether he is pleased with them; but it leads them to abandon themselves to him, to occupy themselves only with him, and not to think so much of themselves beyond what is necessary in order to correct their faults, to advance in perfection, and not at all to satisfy self-love and supply an assurance, that, not coming from God, is merely matter of illusion.

In proportion as Divine Love becomes triumphant over disorderly self-love, it frees us from the pain caused by this torturer of the heart, which disguises itself under a hundred different masks, shelters itself under a hundred pretexts in order to make us think more about ourselves than of God.

## SECOND POINT.

The love of God either prevents us from falling into those temptations which are the most terrible and dangerous that it is our lot to encounter, or it gives us the strength to overcome them. How many souls there are who afflict themselves and dry up their devotion, almost falling into despair through giving an entrance to that frightful doubt, and asking themselves if they are, or are not, of the number of the predestinate. "I have sinned," they say, "of that I am certain; so I deserve hell; but has God forgiven me? Am I again in his Grace? I might die at this very moment. If I were to do so—where shall I go?—I do not at all know!" What a terrible uncertainty! Yet it is one that simply freezes persons of a melancholy temperament who are also given to sombre imaginations and dominated by self-love. It freezes them with terror and consternation, and this sometimes goes so far as to affect their reason. More inclined by nature to fear than to hope, they see heaven closed against them, and hell yawning at their feet. They are absorbed, night and day, by this sad idea, which never leaves them; in vain does their confessor try to reassure them even by the most solid reasoning on the very foundation of religious truth; in vain does he tell them that it is God's Will to keep us in ignorance of our future destiny and the present state of our souls, that we may not fall into presumption, but be kept in that

state of humility which is our greatest safeguard; that it is his Will to take from us all confidence in ourselves that we may be entirely dependent on him; that it is impossible for a soul that abandons itself to him and rests on his goodness to perish, provided that it does all in its power to assure its salvation. These reasons and others like to them make hardly any impression on those people when they have admitted the temptation to doubt, and nothing cures their sick spirit. Self-love and self-interest are the foundation of all this trouble. Now what must be done to attack the evil and cut it up from the root? This fear-stricken soul must turn its eyes towards God and his love, believing that if it is zealous for God's interests, he on his part will have a particular care for it; that, if it prefers the Will of God to all else, it must wish that that Will may be done, and be assured that, with such a wish, its salvation can run no risk; that if it lives in charity, it is morally certain that it will die in charity; and that wherever it goes, if it is full of the love of God, it will be in Paradise. True, it is very difficult to make these reasons enter into the head of a person so infected, and to make a self-interested heart relish these sentiments. But, really, if the trouble is not inveterate, and if the sufferer is not obstinate, love is the sole remedy for this temptation, as it is the only preservative from it. The origin of this temptation varies; sometimes it springs from ourselves, and then love either prevents it from arising, or, if it has arisen,

love stops its effects, by destroying the cause. Sometimes, by the permission of God, it comes from the devil; and then God, who gives help in proportion to the need, renders the soul victorious by the purity and disinterestedness of true love. For in this case it is not so much a temptation as a trial sent from God, who sends this sort of trial to souls capable of bearing them and of rising superior to them by the generosity of their love.

### THIRD POINT.

The way of love gives God incomparably more glory than either of the others. A single soul who walks courageously in this way glorifies him more than thousands of others. Besides, such a soul merits and obtains from him the most special graces: graces of preservation, graces of protection, graces of predilection; graces which make it bring forth acts of heroic virtue, which render easy that which is most difficult and even impossible to others; graces, in short, which make it advance with strides along the road of perfection and carry it far beyond ordinary limits. Ordinary souls, pious it may be, exact and faithful, understand nothing, and can understand nothing, of the interior disposition of a soul tending to the purity of love, nor guess at the height of sanctity which such a soul reaches. God treats like a Father those who have the affection of children for him, and who try to serve him by love. Since it is he who gives them that love, and as all they have



to do is to correspond with it, what pleasure he must take in seeing it grow and increase in proportion to their fidelity ! He will not let them lose a moment ; but at every instant he gives fresh fuel for the fire which he had kindled within them ; and he does not cease to make it burn more and more fiercely until it is an ardent furnace which consumes even the least impurity in the soul. It is thus that he proves to what a point he loves his children, and how far his tenderness and watchful paternal goodness extends in their regard. The most certain mark that a soul is very dear to God is when he asks much from it ; and he acts thus until it has given him all it has, or lets him take from it all that it would not know how to give him itself. A truly loving soul misunderstands nothing in God's dealings with it ; it recognizes that the love he has for it is inexorably jealous, and realizes that he takes care to despoil it of all, to snatch all else from it, for the sole reason that it may belong only and utterly to himself.

Love is the one way that introduces us into the interior life, which obtains for us the gift of prayer with all the favours that accompany it, which establishes a familiar friendship between God and us. Love makes us taste, here below, the sweetness of his friendship, it unites us to him, and transforms us into him in an ineffable manner.

Let us love, then, and let us think only of how to love, and leave God to do the rest. That which he will do for us, even in this life, will surpass all

our thoughts, hopes and desires. The more disinterested we are in loving him, the more he will pour out on us his goodness. He grants small favours to those who ask for such things. The great ones he keeps for those who do not aspire to them, and who know nothing to be compared to the practice of Love.

## CONSIDERATION

### ON THE THOUGHT OF HEAVEN

The thought of Heaven, which seems specially to belong to the virtue of hope, is well suited to incite us to love, if we look at it from its own side. In Heaven, what will all my joy and glory consist in? In loving. What shall I do, during eternity? That which God himself does: I shall love. I shall not *believe* any more, for I shall see; I shall not *hope* any more, for I shall possess; love will entirely occupy and absorb me. All my other feelings will there be lost in that of love. And what kind of love? A love that is perfectly pure, absolutely disinterested, quite free from any reflection on self apart from God; a love which will so entirely fix my thoughts and affections on him that I shall be able to love my companions in bliss, or even myself in no other way than in and for God: because "*God will be all in all*," as the Apostle says.<sup>1</sup> A love, in short, which will be

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv 20.

so far from allowing me to appropriate in the least the joy he causes me, that at the first signal of his Divine Will, I shall be instantly ready to sacrifice that joy, ineffable as it is, to love, if he asks the sacrifice of me. Have I any realization what such love is? I am, perhaps, called to practise it for all eternity. Such is the fire which will burn and penetrate the blissful inhabitants of Heaven, as the very different fire of Hell will burn and penetrate the lost.

Heaven is the dwelling-place of love, as hell is the place whence love is shut out; this gives the best idea that we can have both of the one and the other. If I may venture to say so, it is how God himself regards them. In Heaven he reigns by the effusion of his love which he sheds upon all who form his court, and which they faithfully return to him, without any one of them keeping back any for self. There is therefore a continual ebb and flow of love coming from the adorable Trinity which is its source, and continually returning to the Trinity again.

In Hell, God reigns in a terrible manner, by keeping back his love for ever from the lost. They hate him and he must needs hate them; they curse God and are accursed of him; they would not love him in time—that was the crime of which they were guilty—they shall not love him in eternity—behold their punishment.

If I consider Heaven and Hell from this point of view, what a powerful motive shall I have for loving God! What shall I not be willing to do or to suffer

to ensure to myself the happiness of loving him always, for ever, and to avoid the unspeakable misery of never being able to love him? The measure of my love here below will be that of my love in Heaven; it is love alone that decides the rank and degree of beatitude. There will be no other distinction among the Elect than that of charity. What a noble ambition, supremely agreeable to God and satisfying to a faithful soul, is that of aspiring by love to the first places in Heaven, in order solely to love God more. O God ! grant that I may have no other ambition than this, that Love may be all in all to me, that I may see it everywhere, that I may seek it everywhere, that I may only wish and work for Heaven in view of love; that I may dread hell and study to avoid it, only because the holy love of God is banished from thence.

## FIFTH DAY

### *JESUS CHRIST AS THE MODEL OF DIVINE LOVE*

#### FIRST MEDITATION

##### FIRST POINT.

The Incarnation of the Word is unquestionably the greatest marvel, the most wonderful work that God has ever accomplished or could accomplish outside of himself. No other can approach this. But what was the intention of God, in raising man, in the Person of Jesus Christ, to the highest and most intimate union with the Divinity? Nothing else than this, that God might be loved as he deserves to be. Now, God could not be thus loved except by a Man-God. None, simply a creature, however perfect we may suppose such an one could be, or to whatever degree of grace he might be raised, could be capable of loving God with a love that should be really worthy of him, for such love must be without measure, must be incapable of increase, either in quality or in degree. Such was the love of Jesus Christ. By the Hypostatic Union that love was infused in all its plenitude, he always exercised it

on earth, and for ever exercises it in heaven in all this plenitude; in so perfect a manner that the accumulation of all mere creatures, actual or possible, could in no way be compared with the immense love that fills the Sacred Heart of Jesus. I would not say, nevertheless, that Jesus Christ as Man loves God as much as God loves himself. That is impossible. But I will say that he loves God more than all angels and all men together could love him. We may form some idea from this how greatly God is glorified by the plan of the Incarnation and the execution of that plan; since by means of It, God gains a love that is unique, eminent and unequalled.

#### SECOND POINT.

Let us now consider more particularly the effects which the Hypostatic Union has produced in the Soul of Jesus Christ. In the first place, his understanding was enriched with knowledge the most extended, the most distinct and clear, of the Godhead, of its infinite perfections in every kind and every degree, and of the number and force of the motives to love him. He has therefore known in a more sublime way than that of any other intelligence, and inferior only to that of God himself, how infinitely worthy God is of love. Secondly, knowledge being the foundation of love, his Heart has loved God in the exact degree that his Mind has known him to be worthy of love. In saying this, all is said. But who can comprehend? To attempt to explain the great-



ness and the purity of that love would be labour in vain; no thought, no feeling, no expression can approach it. We must believe, be silent and adore. Thirdly, the gift and consecration of his whole Being, made to God by Jesus Christ, has answered to that knowledge and that love. That is to say, that this consecration has been as voluntary, as entire, as irrevocable, as perfect under every aspect, as it could be on the part of a Man-God. His Mind showed it to him as a homage indispensably due on every title to the supreme Sovereignty of God. His Heart, all inflamed with love, found no other means of witnessing to the sentiments which the loveliness of God excited, and the boundless gratitude which his benefits deserved. And his Will, which is perfectly free, was borne and impelled with all its strength to devote itself to the good pleasure of God, which was well known to it. Nor did he put off this act of devotion. To know God, to love him, to give to him: these three acts follow each other uninterruptedly; and he has made them incessantly from the very instant of his Conception in the Bosom of Mary.

### THIRD POINT.

Jesus Christ has been given to us to be our Head and Model. He came to show us by his own example to what a degree God is deserving of love, and how he wishes to be loved by us. He has not only loved God, as it were, in his own Name, but in ours also.

He has fulfilled that first and supreme obligation of loving God, first on his own part and then on that of the whole human race, who could not do so worthily except by him, with him and in imitating his example as exactly as possible. For this is the intention of God, in the first place, that we should have, as Christians, our part in the treasures of wisdom and knowledge belonging to Jesus Christ; in the second place, that we should make the same use that Jesus Christ has made of the knowledge of himself that God has given, and of the habitual charity poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit; that is to say, that we should use this knowledge and charity to devote ourselves to God and thus to love him with all our mind, with all our heart, and with all our strength; and in the third place, that, intending to follow and imitate Jesus Christ as closely as possible, we should study his dispositions with regard to his Father, tracing all the acts of his Life to that love which was, indeed, the great motive of all his conduct.

## SECOND MEDITATION

### FIRST POINT.

It was from love to God that Jesus Christ was ever and only occupied with the interests of his Father. Notice these two words *ever* and *only*. There was

not a single moment in his Life when he was not giving honour to his Father, whether by his interior thoughts, or by his exterior actions, or by his sufferings. Short as was his Life, it was filled with love, love that left no void. He ever had only his Father in view, never thinking of himself, never looking at his own interests. Love kept him always out of himself; and not only was he exempt from all self-interest, either for time or for eternity, but he could not be otherwise; zeal for the glory of his Father devoured him, as it is written "eaten him up,"<sup>1</sup> the Will of his Father was "his meat,"<sup>2</sup> and he did always that which was pleasing to his Father.<sup>3</sup> Love necessarily produces the same effects, though in a very inferior degree, in souls that are truly and deeply possessed by it. We see this clearly in the lives of the Saints, particularly those which we have at all in detail. We easily remark that, from the moment when they really gave themselves to God, they ceased to care for their own interests and thought only of his glory; they consecrated all their time to him and referred all their actions to him; little by little they quite forgot themselves, to care for him alone. Are my mind and my heart turned constantly towards God as theirs were? Is his love the soul of my feelings, of my thoughts, my plans, my actions, and of all my conduct? If it is not thus with me, if in my life I find intervals not filled with love, it is because my love is still very weak, and I am far from copying my Model.

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxviii 10.    <sup>2</sup> St John iv 32.    <sup>3</sup> St John viii 29.

But can anyone be "*ever*" and "*only*" occupied with God? A soul that loves can never ask such a question; rather it asks how any moment can be occupied with anything else. If you love, you will find the thing not only possible, but easy, and that a heart wounded by love does not find that it can do otherwise.

#### SECOND POINT.

Jesus Christ was always kept in dependence on his Father by love; and this dependence was complete, entire.

Dependence of the *mind*. Jesus Christ never had, nor did he wish to have, any other thought than that inspired by his Father. Dependence of the *heart*, whose movements, although free, were always in harmony with the commands, and ruled by the wishes of his Father. Dependence in his *Words*; he never spoke a single word other than those given him by his Father (put into his mouth, so to speak); this he expressly tells us in the Gospel. Dependence in all the *states of his Life*; he never embraced any of his own mere choice; all were determined by his Father, even in the smallest circumstances, and to this he conformed exactly, without changing any. Dependence in his *Works*; he did no single thing from his own wish. Until nearly thirty years old he was subject to his parents, who were to him the representatives of his Father; during the course of his public Life, not a journey, not a passing to any place,

not a sermon preached, not a miracle worked that can be traced to his own will: all was measured and ruled by the Will of his Father. It was the same with his prayers, with the time he spent in prayer and with what he experienced in it; with all he had to suffer from his enemies during his Life and in his Passion as well as with the way he bore himself in all his sufferings either interiorly or from without. In a very true sense it may be said that Jesus Christ was always *passive*; he always let himself be led in everything, and only made use of his liberty when the glory of his Father demanded it and in order to co-operate with his designs.

This dependence of Jesus Christ, the greatest that has ever been or could be, seems to me a strange and terrible constraint; I have never tried to put such dependence in practice, but could better accommodate myself to what is absolutely commanded or forbidden, such as would leave to my own disposal my thoughts, my affections, and general conduct. What! to have no choice in any matter! Not to be able to take as much as a single step on my own initiative! To be reduced to consult the good pleasure of God in everything, and to conform myself exactly to that! What a strange subjection and galling captivity! When I think and speak in this way, I show clearly that I know nothing of Divine Love, and the extent of its rights; that I know still less how sweet it is to depend upon love, and how those who live under the law of love are far indeed from wishing to escape from it.

St Augustine said: "Love; and then do whatever you will," because you could not do anything contrary to love without ceasing to love. We may, indeed, say as well: "Love, in order to do whatever you will," because love would always make us to will what it wishes us to do. Thus, in obeying love, we always do our own will; we like and wish to do whatever love asks of us, even when it is a constraint and captivity, love makes us willing. If I have not found it so already, it is because I have not loved; if I have sometimes but rarely experienced it, the reason is that I have seldom acted from a motive of pure love.

### THIRD POINT.

Love made Jesus Christ go so far as to immolate himself to the hardest, the most rigorous, demands of the Will of his Father. He made this sacrifice when he came into the world and the execution of it was faithfully continued during the whole course of his Life, whilst his painful and ignominious Death was the consummation. If we only consider what he had to endure exteriorly, we shall find enough to frighten the most courageous souls; but if we penetrate into his interior sufferings we shall see that the pains and trials which Jesus Christ accepted and underwent were incomparably greater. And how did he make this sacrifice? With what dispositions? With a will that was generous, full and without hesitation or deliberation on the excess of humiliations and agonies to which he must submit. He knew



all, for all had been shown to him distinctly, but his love offered himself for all; if it had been the good pleasure of his Father that far greater sacrifices should be asked of him, he would have submitted. And how did he accomplish his sacrifice? To the fullest extent, without leaving one single detail. He willingly drained the bitter chalice to the last drop; nor did he render up his spirit until he could say, "*It is consummated.*" Thus, the greatest love that ever was, honoured God by the greatest sacrifice.

Now let me see how I ought (in proportion to my capability) to love. Love does not consist in sweet feelings, that bear no fruit; it is not the making fine promises, which have no effects; it does not lie in imagining future sacrifices, the opportunities for which may never occur. Such love is cheap, it costs nothing; or, rather, it is not love at all, since it costs nothing it is worth nothing, and no one cares for what is valueless. To love implies to give. To give what? All that love demands. It means to give promptly, joyfully, without regret; it means wishing that more were asked of it and never to be satisfied and think it has given enough, as long as it has anything more to give. A good lover suffers willingly for love whatever is most repugnant to nature, whether pain of mind or body, or grief of heart. Love makes a soul willing to suffer in whatever way its Beloved pleases, preferring the crosses chosen for it, rather than those self-will would select; bearing them so long

as its Divine Lover wishes, without seeking relief or consolation, either human or divine, without complaining of their long duration, even if it should be prolonged until the last breath. This is how Jesus Christ loved. Have I loved like this? Will I love like this in future? All love that is not like his is but an illusion.

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### FIRST POINT.

If, on reflecting on my interior dispositions, I do not feel that I have enough love to be "*ever and only*" occupied with the interests of God; to have such zeal for his Glory as will make me wish that he should be known, adored and served by all creatures; such zeal as will make me rejoice at the honour he receives from some and burn at the outrages he suffers from others; if I do not feel that I love him enough to live in entire dependence on his grace; to make me embrace willingly and gladly all the sacrifices he may ask of me, I must take all the blame on myself; and it would be a sort of blasphemy to throw it on God, as if it depended only on him that I should love him enough, and as if it does not depend on myself. He has given me his own Son; the Sacred Heart of that Son contains the plenitude of divine love; It is always open, always

accessible, ever willing and ready to receive me. I may go there, and draw from the very Source as often and as abundantly as I please. I need not fear that It will dry up or be exhausted; I am certain of being lovingly received; the oftener I draw near, the wider will that Adorable Heart dilate Itself for me, the more abundantly will It pour out to me Its own feelings of love. After all this, shall I not be a guilty criminal if I remain cold and icy, when I might at every moment draw near to this Furnace of love, when I might always stay there, being not only invited, but warmly pressed to come, and never to go away again from that Divine Heart?

When God commands me to love, does he mean me to spend that love on myself? Certainly not, because love comes from him and can come only from him; but in giving me Jesus Christ, he means me to love him to the utmost possible extent, because Jesus Christ has been given to me for this very reason and has received so much love in order that he may communicate it to me. What, then, ought I to do? In the first place, I must humble myself and be confounded, and reproach myself bitterly because, having the very Gift of Love put at my disposal, I have asked so seldom and coldly that Jesus Christ would give it me—perhaps I have even not asked for it at all. After this, I must go to him with a certain shame, but still with confidence, begging him to forgive my tepidity and negligence in the past, and to admit me now to enrich my heart with

the inexhaustible treasure of love which his Sacred Heart possesses. I have but to do this, praying, entreating, importuning with my utmost urgency, resolved to go on and to persevere; and my prayers will be granted and far more than merely granted, but beyond all that I ask or think.

#### SECOND POINT.

Jesus Christ having been given as my Pattern, I am indispensably obliged to imitate him; but in what can I imitate him if I do not follow his example of love? It is by this that I must begin, by this I must continue and by this fulfil my end. For all the imitation of Christ is reduced to this command of love. Love was the beginning, the motive and the end of all his Virtues. If I want to copy this my Model, I must begin by studying It well, and there is one short and easy method for learning it thoroughly. I have but to consider love as the base of all his thoughts, his feelings and his actions, and to look at every mystery and feature of his Life in the light of love. Then I must compare in the same way my own life with the image that I long to reproduce in myself. Love must be the foundation of the edifice of my perfection, but I must lay this foundation very deep and make it very solid. Love cannot endure any limitations; it ought to be unshakably firm and proof against all shocks. It must be stronger than death, its jealousy deeper than hell; the waters of tribulation must be unable to quench its fire, and the waves of temptation

unable to drown it.<sup>1</sup> Such is the love that Jesus is ready to give me, if I sincerely wish for it and ask for it earnestly; indeed, he can give me no other love, because, indeed, there is no other true love than this.

Having once laid my strong foundation, it will be easy for me to build on it and raise a house of all the virtues which must be supported by love and rest firmly on it, otherwise they will never rise to any great height, nor will they have any solidity, but will be thrown down by the least shock. But, how high shall I build my house, my spiritual house? Ah! the height must reach even to heaven; God alone knows the exact measure, but if I try to raise it only so far, or so far, by my own ideas, my building will always remain imperfect.

Dost thou well understand this, my soul? Dost thou see that the perfection God expects of a Christian is a temple built upon love, a temple embracing all the virtues and which raises them to their very highest? The workman must always be at work upon it, improving, retouching, perfecting it; and God puts an end himself to the work by the finishing stroke at death.

### THIRD POINT.

But shall I have the courage to undertake this work, to build such an edifice and to carry the design to completion? Love will give me the courage. The price which Jesus Christ paid, which it cost him to

<sup>1</sup> Cant. viii 6, 7.

raise his to the infinite height which God asked of him, incomparably surpasses all that mine will cost me. Did he bargain with his Father? Did he count the cost of all he would have to suffer? Was he astonished at the sight of his pains and did he shrink back from the weight of the immense burden with which he was laden? No, by no means: the ardour of his love consumed all that, as fire burns straw; and, to apply to Jesus Christ the saying of Holy Scripture with regard to Jacob's long servitude and delay, "it seemed to him as nothing because of the greatness of his love."<sup>1</sup> If he had been able to suffer more, he would not have hesitated to offer himself for it; and we may be assured that his very love, which made all his pain seem light to him, that very love made his greatest and most violent suffering. But the suffering caused by love has always its own sweetness, however sharp it may be in other ways; for suffering is part of love and cannot be separated from it except by the destruction of love. Besides, Jesus Christ was always calm, satisfied, happy in the midst of the pain caused by love, or which love induced him to accept.

If I love, it will be the same with me. I shall draw a strength from love that will rise superior to pains and labours, to obstacles and difficulties. The greater their number, the more formidable they appear, the more love will animate my courage, to overcome them; and the greater they are, the more

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xxix 20.



courage will be given me, and so they will come to an end sooner. Nothing is more certain than that the first of our crosses, which are really, probably, the lightest, seem the hardest. When love, which was weak at first, has gathered strength by its victorious battles, it finds the heaviest and most bitter crosses light and sweet; instead of complaining of them and longing for deliverance, it thirsts after fresh combats, and never suffers enough for its zeal. Just as fire, when it is beginning to kindle, burns slowly and with difficulty; but when it reaches a certain degree of force, devours and consumes in an instant the very things that most resisted its activity. We have the proof of this in the Saints who have been led by love to walk in the footprints of Jesus Christ. The first steps in this journey were the most painful to nature; in proportion as they advanced they walked more fleetly, they ran, they flew; love itself bore them to the goal with unspeakable swiftness. However, we must remember, their trials increased with their progress.

## CONSIDERATION

### ON HOLY COMMUNION AS A MEANS TO DIVINE LOVE

The pious and frequent reception of Holy Communion is, undoubtedly, the most efficacious means of increasing and fostering divine love in our souls. If all grace, by its very nature, tends either to bring

love to life within us, or to make it grow if it is already alive, with how much more reason will the Author of Grace himself do so, when he gives himself to us in the Eucharist, which is, above all, the Sacrament of love ! It is the most wonderful invention of love, worthy of all admiration. In It Jesus Christ unites and incorporates himself with our souls ; he enters into us, that we may enter into him. And what do we receive, when we receive this adorable Sacrament ? Love itself, in its Source, love in its full completeness, love that burns ardently in its desire to communicate itself in the same degree to which the soul is disposed to receive it. "He that eateth my Flesh and drinketh my Blood, abideth in me, and I in him."<sup>1</sup> In other words, he dwells in love, and love in him.

But what ought to be the disposition of the soul in order that Holy Communion may produce the great effects for which It is instituted ? If you want to gain these effects, I tell you that in the reception of the Body of Jesus Christ you must consider love only ; look only for love and you will find it there. Let love be your preparation, your leader and guide to the Feast, let love be your companion at the Holy Table, and keep love with you when you retire from it. You may try a thousand methods of communicating with fruit. Far better is it to have only this one, which, in its simplicity, contains all others and surpasses all in its excellence. Acknowledge in all humility and truth that you are utterly incapable of

<sup>1</sup> St John vi 57.

worthily performing so holy an action by your own efforts. Commit all to love; deliver yourself to it; give your whole heart to it. Occupy yourself sweetly and peacefully with the thought of all the love Jesus Christ shows you, and the love which he expects from you in gratitude. Tell him that you love him, and that you only receive him in order that you may love him better. But be careful, in the first place, not to seek after sweet feelings only of love when you go to communicate. What you must aim at and desire is the strength of love, its generosity, its disinterestedness; and be on your guard against the sensuality of self-love. In the second place, do not imagine that love is given you only for the actual time of Communion. When you leave the Holy Table you ought to return home with more love than you brought with you, and consequently with the determination to keep yourself more recollected, more united to God; to be more attentive and faithful to grace, more watchful over yourself, more courageous in overcoming yourself, more charitable to those around you, sweeter and more patient in bearing with them, more careful to fulfil well the duties of your state, more generous in giving to God, stronger to embrace all kinds of crosses which he may lay upon you. For all this is nothing else but love put in practice, and when you go more or less often to the Source and Fount of love, you do so that the reception of the Body of Jesus Christ may make you carry out more perfectly the various obligations of a Christian life,

which is, after all, only a life of love. It was by communicating thus and gathering these fruits in communion that the Saints attained to the perfection of love; and you will do the same if you follow the method I propose to you. But one thing is of the utmost importance if you would follow this practice with success, and that is, to have a most firm resolution that you will belong to God, without reserve and in entirety—that you will refuse him nothing, and will never commit even the smallest fault deliberately; otherwise you would delude yourself and your heart would deceive you, when you pretend to unite yourself with Jesus Christ by love, and to have no other end in receiving him.

Let me say a word as to assisting at Mass and visiting the Blessed Sacrament. What is the Mass? It is the memorial, the renewal and continuation of the Sacrifice of Calvary, of that great Sacrifice of love in which Jesus Christ as Priest offered himself, and as Victim was consumed. The same is done in an unbloody manner upon our altars. Jesus Christ is there really the Priest and Victim; he offers himself there to his Father in his own Name and in ours, with the same love with which he offered himself on Calvary.

In what better way can we hear Mass than by keeping ourselves occupied with that ineffable love—offering ourselves with Jesus Christ and by him, as a holocaust to God, to be consumed by the fire of his Love? When we present our heart thus, a divine

## HOLY COMMUNION AND DIVINE LOVE III

flame will issue from the Holy Altar, and at once enkindle and consume it. In the same way, how can we make our Visits to Jesus Christ in the Tabernacle more acceptable to him than by coming simply from a motive of love, and with the desire of increasing it and showing how much we wish to love him? The mystical Life of Jesus is all love; it is love alone that has put and holds him in that state. Let us go then and acknowledge this excess of love; let us contemplate him in the silence of admiration; and let us beg of him to keep us in the same silence of annihilation before him, as he himself remains annihilated in the Presence of his Father. We seem only to know how to visit Jesus Christ from self-interest, and only speak to him about our own wants. But is any other of our wants so great as our need of loving God, and of always loving Him more and more? Let us feel this deeply; let us entreat, beg and implore it constantly. This is the best way of having all our other needs supplied.

## SIXTH DAY

### ON THE CHARACTERISTICS, EFFECTS, AND MARKS OF DIVINE LOVE

#### FIRST MEDITATION

##### ON THE CHARACTERISTIC QUALITIES OF THIS LOVE

##### FIRST POINT.

The love of God possesses three characteristics which we may call its principal qualities: its extent, its strength and its disinterestedness. By the nature of the human heart, whose desires always yearn after the infinite, love, as well as the other passions, knows no limits. If it is limited, these restraints are not made by the heart, but either by reason, or by faith, or by the preponderance of some object or other in our thoughts or in our affections. But neither reason, nor faith, nor the preponderance of any other object can put a legitimate limit to the love of God. On the contrary, both reason and faith agree in removing all limits whatsoever; and other objects being in themselves nothing, and only worthy of being loved in reference to God, these cannot authorize us in restraining his love. So also, on the side of God, the Being infinitely worthy of love, the love which of its own nature tends to an equality with his claim for love, can and ought to increase



indefinitely, and is only necessarily limited by the finite capacity of the creature. This kind of infinity resembles that of number and measure, which, though always remaining finite, are capable of infinite augmentation.

On the side of the soul that loves, divine love only aspires to become ever greater; it can never stop, nor look upon any degree as being enough. The heart can never say, "I will love just so much, so far; I will not love beyond that." The true love of God gives all, wishes to give more if it could; it keeps nothing back; it suffers and endures everything and wishes to do so; it excepts nothing. It knows no human prudence; it does not reason; it never looks on ahead nor fears consequences. Guided by an instinct superior to reason, it faithfully follows that instinct which in the soul is blind, though most enlightened in itself. Its highest wisdom is to follow the Divine attraction even as far as to foolishness. Did not Jesus Christ love so far even as to the "foolishness of the Cross"? as St Paul tells us.<sup>1</sup> A God who becomes Man, is born an Infant, embraces all the weaknesses of infancy and childhood, who obeys his own creatures, who earns his own bread by toil, who allows himself to be scorned, calumniated, persecuted, outraged, overwhelmed with torments and outrages, who dies at last on an infamous gibbet to show God his Father the extremity of his love—what is all this, from a human point of view, but an

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. i 18.

inconceivable excess of folly? But from the Divine point of view it is the most sublime wisdom; a Man-God could not love less. When passionate love makes a man or woman joyfully sacrifice their goods, their repose, reputation, health, even life itself for the person beloved, we call it folly; and so, indeed, it is, for the object loved is not worth such sacrifices. But when anyone renounces the world and its riches, honours and pleasures for God; when he crucifies his flesh for God by all sorts of austerities; if he sacrifices, should occasion demand and God asks it of him, his health, his reputation and his life; if he even goes further, and puts the good pleasure of God before his own happiness; this is not folly, it is supernatural wisdom, more or less approaching to that of Jesus Christ. And why is this? The reason is because God is worthy of all these sacrifices; because, when love asks them of us, it is our duty to give them; because it is an impossibility that he who gives all to God can lose anything thereby, since by this he gains the ineffable possession of God himself.

#### SECOND POINT.

The second quality of the love of God is strength, its very great force. Now, what kind of strength? A force that is irresistible; nothing can resist it; a strength that tramples under foot the world with its attractions and threats; the devil with his temptations; a strength that triumphs over the softnesses of the flesh and the corruption of nature; quells the most

violent passions and overcomes the most inveterate habits; humbles self-will and brings it into subjection; weakens and destroys self-love; a strength that wrestles (like Jacob) even with God himself in the trials through which he makes the soul pass. See the strength of love in the martyrs! See it in the solitaries; in the religious of both sexes who have embraced and endured the most austere of lives! See it in so many illustrious penitents whose mortifications of every kind surpass imagination, and, as it seems, are above the powers of our weak human nature! See it in those apostles and missionaries who burn with zeal to proclaim Jesus Christ to the nations sunk in idolatry, to savages, to barbarians, and who have not been hindered by any difficulty, any danger, any fatigue, but who consider it the crown of their immense labours to have the happiness of shedding their blood for Christ! And finally, behold that love in interior souls, who have been led by it along extraordinary ways, by the roughest paths of the Cross, and who have been voluntary victims of pain known only to God and which the human spirit knows not how to value!

Love is real only in proportion to its strength. If it is easily rebuffed and intimidated, or draws back at the sight of what it must do or suffer, it is weak. I know that it becomes strong by degrees and not all at once, nor should it be said that the soul does not love, or that it loves but little because it is not yet able for certain efforts of courage or of patience. A

child may be strong for its age, although it is very weak in comparison to a grown man. But as God, who is All-wise, proportions our trials to our actual love, we may conclude that our love is weak when it recoils before the occasions of exerting it which occur daily and does not second the inspirations of the Holy Spirit; that it is weak if it is not faithful in those small opportunities which are so often presented to it, and if it constantly falls from fervour into a state of relaxation; that it is weak if it succumbs at the least difficulty and cannot overcome the smallest obstacle. Finally, it is weak and very feeble if, when God asks anything of it, it should be determined not to grant it.

### THIRD POINT.

The third quality of Divine love is *disinterestedness*. A disinterested spirit is really essential to true love; that is to say, it must attach itself to its Object for the sake of that object alone, and not in view of any advantages for itself, either in the present or the future; real love sets no value on these things; they may, indeed, originate or increase love, but ought not to be its object. If I love God merely on account of his gifts and rewards, it is not really God that I love, but those gifts and recompenses. If I love God truly, the object of my love must be God, taken in himself, without paying any attention to the thought of what he may give me or promise me. I admit willingly that his benefits and promises give me occa-

sion to know, to admire and to love his goodness, liberality and magnificence. But when I love these perfections in God, I love himself. I admit, too, that eternal happiness being promised to love, this bliss and the wish I have to be happy are powerful motives to make me love; but the motive of love is not the object of love. Thus there is a certain love of God that springs from and follows hope. But God, in himself, is the Object of my love, even when considered as good, liberal, and loving to communicate himself. This is clear and would be easy to demonstrate by the love men have for one another.

Unfortunately, self-love, which only regards its own interests, slips into our love of God and soils all its purity. It turns away our eyes from the Creator, Benefactor, Consoler and Rewarder, and fixes them on the benefits, the consolations and rewards; it inclines us to attach ourselves to these, to seek after and enjoy them in a spirit of appropriation because we are at ease with them; and to serve God principally for this object. This self-love is not a sin, inasmuch as it does not withdraw us from the obedience we owe to God; but it soils our love of God.

Now, the love of God will not suffer any mixture which sullies its purity, and it tends with all its force to free itself from such. Thus, as soon as it takes possession of a heart, it labours to purify that heart from self-love; it does not exclude all thoughts of self-interest—God forbid!—but it does subordinate self-interest to nobler and higher motives; it subjects

that to the good pleasure of God, and will not accept it as the goal of its desires and the final aim of its affections. With the help of ordinary grace we can bring our love to a certain degree of purity. Even our uncertainty as to our eternal destiny is a reason for abandoning ourselves to the Will of God and acquiescing by love in whatever he decides as to our lot. God draws this acquiescence from some people at the moment of death. He allows others to experience horrible temptations against hope, and that they should be falsely persuaded that they will be lost: and, by a sublime effort of love, they make the conditional sacrifice of their eternal happiness to God, and continue to serve him, making heroic acts of virtue, suffering for him, only for him, without being supported and sustained in any sensible manner by the great motive of hope, which, nevertheless, is always alive in the depths of their heart, and is firmer than ever, but purified, perfected and as if absorbed by love, which, like fire, transforms all virtues into itself.

I have already said, and I cannot repeat too often, that for a soul to go straight to Heaven on leaving this world, its love to God must be really pure. This is absolutely necessary; and, when the soul has no other fault to expiate, when it has no other debt owing to Divine Justice, if self-love be not uprooted from the heart, it is enough to cause that soul to go to Purgatory. For no self-love can enter Heaven; all self-interest is banished from thence. Nothing is known there but



the Love of God, his Glory and his good pleasure; no one there ever thinks of himself, as of himself.

This demands our most serious reflection.

## SECOND MEDITATION

### ON THE EFFECTS OF THE LOVE OF GOD

#### FIRST POINT.

Three things depend on myself, and, with the help of divine grace, I am master of them and can make good use of them. These are, first, my thoughts and intentions; secondly, my desires and affections; thirdly, my plans and actions. Let us think of the effect which the love of God will have, with regard to these three things; not by leading me all at once, with one stride, to perfection, but, as it were, step by step, only the more rapidly as my own love grows greater and my correspondence more faithful.

If I truly love God, the thoughts and intentions of my mind will dwell principally on all that concerns him. I shall willingly occupy myself with him; and shall be glad to speak about him, and with all the interest he deserves. I shall keep his holy Presence in my soul, and love to enter into It and dwell there. I shall avoid all useless thoughts, and shall consider as useless all such as might turn me away from God and dissipate my interior attention, whether these thoughts are

about anything that affects me deeply, or merely such as are amusing.

If I love God sincerely, my wishes and affections will all be consecrated to him; I shall not keep in my heart any desire which might divide it with him; I will not attach myself to anyone or anything against the good pleasure of God, or which might weaken the habit of charity in me, or prevent it from activity, nor admit any attachment which is not likely to strengthen and increase my love of God. Consider these three degrees. The first inspires in me an aversion from all attachments either harmful or dangerous; the second makes me fly from all that are merely frivolous or useless; the third raises me to sanctify, by love, all attachments that are legitimate or allowable.

If I love God sincerely, I shall form no project that does not tend, either directly or indirectly, to his Glory. I shall do no action that might displease him. But that is too little; I will rather make a point of doing only those which have his pleasure for their object. Can the love of God reign supreme in me, if he is not Master of all, if he does not rule and govern all, if all my actions do not spring from him as their Beginning, and do not return to him as their End?

For when I speak of loving God sincerely, I do not mean simply having the habit of charity, which is merely a disposition necessary to a state of grace. A child has this by Baptism, but he does not love any

the more. What I mean is, exercising the habit, putting it into practice. If you do not exercise it, you do not love; if you exercise it a little, you love little. When you begin to put it in practice often, always wishing to practise it more and better, and never being satisfied with yourself on the point, you love much; and if you go on and persevere in doing so, you will love more and more.

## SECOND POINT.

I depend on God for three things, and by each I ought to show my love.

First, in all that belongs to the natural order of Providence. If my love for God is sincere, I shall approve of all his dispositions in my regard; I shall willingly and heartily acquiesce in them, and shall conform myself to them; I shall be very careful not to complain or murmur about them, or make any attempts to free myself from them. This goes very far, and is a great and continual exercise of love, particularly for Christians living in the world. From whence come so many interior revolts, so many complaints as well among the rich as among the poor, the sick as well as those in health, whether of the ordinary accidents of life, or of the evils and troubles to which every condition is exposed? Whence comes it that their circumstances are almost always contrary to their desires, and that their present state is a subject of discontent? All this comes from the lack of love. If they loved God, they would bless him for what-

ever he does for them, whatever he gives; and their will, always submitting to his, could never be displeased. Has love yet had this effect on me? Let me examine myself and see how I stand.

Secondly, I depend on God for those things that fall under his supernatural Providence: such are the exterior means of salvation which, according to various places and times, are more abundant or more rare, more or less near at hand; which are sometimes granted to me and sometimes withdrawn, according to the disposition of Providence; those interior graces of which the dispensation is unknown to me, and which the Holy Spirit himself distributes in the manner and measure most pleasing to him; temptations, sometimes of one kind, sometimes of another, and lasting a longer or shorter time, more or less violent, which attack me when God permits, and from which none other can deliver me but he alone; the spiritual crosses with which the life of a Christian is thickly sown, which are not of my own choice, and whose object is to make me die to myself; consolations, which do not come when I expect them, nor when I most need them, and which leave me so quickly when I most wish to keep them; in short, all the various states and vicissitudes which compose the spiritual life. Here is a great field for the practice of Divine love, and in which it produces marvellous effects. It teaches me, in all that concerns my sanctification, to seek above all else the Glory of God, which is the great end it proposes; to believe that he, being infinitely wise, always

chooses the most suitable means for me, and such as are most appropriate to my present needs; that, since he wills my sanctification much more ardently and more efficaciously than I can do, he will succeed, if I will but trust in him, in everything that regards myself, and limit myself to co-operating faithfully with his designs; that, being infinitely powerful and good, he can and will supply even for such means as he thinks best to deprive me of; and that he infallibly *will* supply if I confide entirely in him, and leave him to work out his own plan, without disarranging it by my own interference. In one word, the effect of love is at once to sanctify me and to make me happy, in keeping me tranquil, firm and invariable under the safe conduct of God.

### THIRD POINT.

The third matter in which I depend utterly and only on supernatural providence, is my final perseverance and the state in which I shall be at the hour of death. And here it is that love brings forth its greatest fruit. For, first it tranquillizes me as to the uncertainty of my present state, whether I am or am not in the grace of God; it gives me the sweet assurance that I can say, with St Augustine, "My conscience, O God, answers me that, without any doubt, I love thee." It is an unspeakable consolation to have this witness that love bears to itself, in the depths of my heart. If I love God, and am certain that I love him, cannot I equally assure myself of his

friendship? Any doubt that could exist must be on my side only; I should not have loved him if he had not first loved me.

And then, love allows of no trouble nor anxiety as to the future; it silences vain and dangerous curiosity; it commands firm and humble confidence. It even inspires me with the indifference of generous abandonment by giving me the interior persuasion that, whatever may be my lot in eternity, if I love God it is impossible for me to be unhappy. Now, nothing in this world or the next can deprive me of the treasure of Divine love, except by an entirely deliberate act of free-will on my own part, and, when that love has reached a certain degree, although there is always the *possibility* of losing it by my own fault, yet only to think that I might consent to such a loss fills me with incredible horror. Besides, the trials and temptations which have been happily overcome give us a guarantee that assures me such a misfortune will not happen. Nothing, then, prevents us from crying out, with St Paul: "I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."<sup>1</sup>

When shall I love like this, so that I may be able to speak in the same way, with equal truth and confidence?

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii 38, 39.



## THIRD MEDITATION

## ON THE MARKS OF THE LOVE OF GOD

## FIRST POINT.

All that has been already said of the effects of Divine love affords us certain marks by which it is easily recognized within us. Here are some which are even more distinct. Love which is confined to outward acts of religion, and produces no feelings in the heart, is not worthy of the name of love; and, if habitual charity should abide in such a heart, it remains idle and without exercise. How many are there who only use vocal prayers, and who pray with their lips alone, in an inattentive, cold and insensible spirit; who assist at Mass, approach the tribunal of Penance and the holy Table in the same lifeless dispositions; who, indeed, scarcely ever think of God or of Jesus Christ! Can they say that they love? Can they hope to preserve even habitual charity for long, if they suffer it thus to remain inactive? And does it not often happen that they lose it entirely, even without perceiving that they have lost it, when their sins are only of thought and of desire? Are they not in great danger of falling on any occasion? If it has happened to me at any time to live in this state, what thanks ought I not to give to our Good God for having mercifully drawn me out of it: and what precautions ought I not to take for the future! Such a misfortune happens insensibly to the most fervent

souls, if they do not keep well on their guard, if they are negligent, if they are not careful to foster and keep their love burning. The weight of our human nature is always inclined to draw us down to laziness and tepidity; we must ever be armed and fighting against Nature. For, if we give way on only one occasion, we run the risk of being carried away, and our fall downhill becomes more and more rapid.

Preserve me, O God, from these sad things, which have happened to others who have made more progress in love than I have yet done. Make me attentive and watchful for the least sign of coldness or negligence: nothing is too small to alarm me in a matter of such vital importance.

## SECOND POINT.

That love which is satisfied with feelings and protestations, without passing on to effects, is nothing but illusion. Such is that kind of devotion which is only nourished by sensible feelings and limits its efforts to procuring these, never ceasing to ask them from Almighty God; the devotion which pleases itself with them when it has them, and is cast down through self-love when it has them not, and which gives up altogether, if they do not return for long. I would say to such as these, "You relish these feelings of love, because of their sweetness; you hardly ever make any efforts after virtue, because that is painful; you fly from trials, because they are bitter. Is this really love, that wants for ever to be receiving and

never giving or suffering? What would you think of anyone who should love you after this fashion?"

The devil often joins forces with this kind of devotion; he counterfeits the operations of grace; he puts deceptive feelings and false sweetness into the souls of those who are greedy of them; and he can easily enough succeed in ensnaring them. God permits him to deceive them as a punishment for their sensuality. They deceive themselves, too, taking for supernatural effects that which is only imagination, coming from a naturally affectionate temperament, put, so to say, under pressure to extract some tear, or some movement of tenderness.

Sensible love is good. God gives it to attract us to him, to sustain us in the beginnings, when we are so weak; to help us to overcome bad habits and contract good ones. But, as he never gives the feelings for the sake of their own sweetness, nor just that we may enjoy them, so we must never let ourselves get attached to them, and still less must we make them the rule and measure of our love to God; since the feeling does not depend upon us, but comes and goes according to the good pleasure of God; and, if our efforts do not respond earnestly, such sweetness will only do us harm.

### THIRD POINT.

That is true love which gives to God generously, joyfully, always wishing to give him more and never satisfied until nothing is left that it can give further.

True love gives whatever is dearest to it, whatever costs it most to give; it gives thus notwithstanding the disinclination of nature and all its efforts to keep back what love is asking for. A true lover is satisfied that God alone should be the witness of his desires, and knows no rest until God is satisfied; if sometimes he resists and keeps back any part, he reproaches himself bitterly and cannot quiet himself until he has given up all heartily and with a good grace. Then love congratulates itself and is as glad as if it had some great gain. A true lover suffers willingly for God's sake; either from men or from the devil or from God himself. He suffers with equal willingness in his possessions, in his honour, in his body or in his soul. He allows himself to be stripped of all, to have everything torn from him until he can say truly, "Thou art my God and my All."

Love is a fire, purifying, destroying, consuming all that belongs to corrupt nature and to self-love; it is a fire that is only fed by sacrifices, which only asks *voluntary* victims and which hates the least robbery in the holocaust. At its birth, love is sweet, in its progress it is strong and vehement, and in its consummation violent and tyrannical. At first love solicits the will sweetly and wins it by its attractiveness; but afterwards it exacts all that is in the power of the will to give. It exacts all because it is the Ruler, the Governor, the Emperor; and at last, love tears from the soul by main force that which the soul cannot give excepting by letting it be taken: with its

consent, it is true; but a consent so subtle and so profound that the soul does not distinguish its own consent, but it seems that all is being done by force, in spite of its will.

There is no call for me to examine whether I have this mark of love in all its perfection; but whether I have at least the first traces of its presence, and whether I have begun to give this miserable human "*self*," which God wishes entirely to possess and whose destruction his love aims at absolutely and mercilessly. Do not, then, let us make plans for sacrifices before God asks them of us; but let us take, with his Grace, the resolution never to refuse him any.

## CONSIDERATION

### ON PURITY OF INTENTION

Everyone will admit that it is the intention that decides the moral value of our actions; that if the intention is right and pure, the action is pleasing to God, and so much the more pleasing in proportion to the rightness and purity of the intention. This is what our Lord Jesus Christ had in view when he said, "The light of thy body is thy eye. If thy eye be single, thy whole body shall be lightsome" (the eye being the intention of the soul, and the body being the actions); "but if thy eye be evil, thy whole body shall be darksome."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> St Matt. vi 22, 23.

As love renders the soul careful to purify its intention in everything, so does carefulness in avoiding all that might sully its purity infinitely increase and enhance love; and this is the reason why souls that are really and deeply in love with God examine themselves so rigorously and carefully on the motives of their actions.

The intention is right when it proposes God as the Object and end of the action, and when it tends to him directly and without turning aside. It is not a right intention which, instead of being directed to God, turns aside to any creature. The intention is pure when the soul has in view God for his own sake, when it aims at his Will and good pleasure before all else; and even when some other motive (that of hope, for instance) has some influence on its action, but is not the dominant power; so that the action would be done in view of God, even if the motive of the recompense were absent. The intention is not pure when the motive of pleasing God and of doing his Will because it is his Will, is not the ruling motive, but that some other interested reason dominates it in such a way that, for the pure intention of pleasing God, the action would not be done at all. Much more is the intention impure when some gross motive of self-love intrudes itself, such as any temporal interest, of vainglory, or the secret wish to please creatures.

Such low motives of self-love often have a share in the good actions of imperfect Christians, who



would, otherwise, act from pure motives, but who love God feebly and who, in a great measure, seek themselves. These rarely act from a right intention, one that truly tends to God; very few of their actions are done by supernatural motives, and thus they can expect no reward from God for these actions, because they were not done for him. It is still more rare that their intentions are pure and have no other selfish motive gliding in, tarnishing their brightness and robbing them of much of their value.

It sometimes happens, indeed I may say it often happens, that in beginning, the action is undertaken with a right and a pure intention, but that afterwards creeps in some motive that turns the eye of the soul from God. It may be a secret thought of self-love, or some vain complaisance in itself, some wish to attract the esteem of others, or some self-congratulation at having obtained it. Even the greatest Saints have not always been free from these vicious feelings; but they resist and reject them as soon as they are aware of them, and reproach themselves for the least shadow of negligence. From love they learn two things: first, in everything they do, to propose to themselves views that are pure from self-seeking, and worthy of God; the second, not to suffer any human motive, anything low, interested, imperfect, to come in afterwards and spoil its purity. These two points, of daily and continual occurrence as they are, form the substance of the examination of their interior sentiments and dispositions; they ceaselessly make

this examen which is really that of the love of God put into practice, and by which rapid progress will be made.

But it is in regard to those things which refer immediately to God and to his service that it is most important to act with a pure intention. As far as possible we ought, in our exercises of piety, in the Christian virtues we practise, as well as in the bodily or spiritual pains we suffer, to make our intention for the Glory of God, the sanctification of his Name, the spread of his Kingdom in ourselves and in others, and the accomplishment of his Holy Will, as Jesus Christ teaches us in the Prayer which we say so often, and to which we pay so little attention. Without excluding the motives of fear and hope, which do no harm to love, when in proper proportion, we ought to do our utmost that love shall always have the first place in all our intentions; so that gradually it may arrive at that pitch of perfection mentioned by St John when he says, "Fear is not in charity; but perfect love casteth out fear,"<sup>1</sup> and that it may refine all self-love from the virtue of hope in our desire after eternal happiness.

May my intention in flying from evil be because sin offends God and displeases him, and because there is nothing I ought to avoid so much as displeasing him: may I have a childlike fear, so that I may be more apprehensive of grieving him than of incurring his anger. May my chief intention in the practice of

<sup>1</sup> 1 St John iv 18.

virtue be because God commanded it, and it is his wish; because the more I grow in holiness, the closer will be my union with him and the more like to him I shall become. In my prayers, Communions and deeds of piety or mortification may I only aim at my own sanctification *after* the Glory of God and his good pleasure, in such a way that I may absolutely lose sight of myself, and God may be All in all. Amen.

## SEVENTH DAY

### *ON THE PRACTICE OF THE LOVE OF GOD*

#### FIRST MEDITATION

##### FIRST POINT.

Whoever has the sincere will to love God with his whole heart, ought to begin by giving himself entirely up to God, that he may do in him and with him all that he pleases. This gift of self to God means an absolute renunciation of personal rights with regard to self into the Hands of God. It means that he has a firm intention not to belong to or dispose of himself; but to deliver himself up to divine Grace, to follow all its leadings; to submit to divine providence and conform to all its dispositions; to commit himself utterly to the divine Will, that It may work all Its good pleasure in him.

This gift is a great act of love. Of ourselves we are incapable of making it, and it requires a special grace from God to enable us to do so. This grace he never refuses to anyone who asks and truly desires to obtain it. But most people, even those who are truly religious, have not this desire really and efficaciously. They wish to give themselves to God and

at the same time to hold back; they would willingly belong to God and also to themselves; they want to follow grace without entirely renouncing nature.

However, until the full, entire, irrevocable gift of self is made to God, the true way of the practice of love can only be entered upon for short intervals, and not with that continuity that makes the life of a Christian a life all love. But what shall we aspire to upon earth, if not to that life of love? Is it not to such a life that God calls me in Heaven? That life where I shall find perfect bliss and beatitude—is not that the one object of my desires? And yet I would not begin it on earth!

O God, let me not end this meditation without giving myself to thee with all the perfection that thou desirest of me, and which I also ought to desire with my whole heart, alike for thy Glory and my own happiness.

## SECOND POINT.

The chief reason why I should thus give myself to God, if I wish to be led by the way of love, is because the Source of love is in God; from him it comes to us, and he gives it to us in the proportion in which we give ourselves to him; because it is he who inspires the practices and furnishes the occasions of love, who by his actual grace makes us produce acts of it and inclines us to sanctify by love all our thoughts, our desires and our actions. For of all this, we could do nothing of ourselves; God must go before and

act first, then he must help us to co-operate, and this very co-operation must be more his work than our own.

Now, in order that God may make us love him as much as he desires and as much as we are able, our heart must be at his free disposition; it must, consequently, belong to him, and we must have made it and our liberty over to him by an unreserved donation on our part. Otherwise we are always disappointing him and vexing him, putting obstacles in his way and thwarting his designs; he will wish some certain thing, and we shall not wish it. Has not this often happened to us before now? Has it not been the sole cause of our sins, our imperfections, our want of progress in the way of love? And what is it that we have put in opposition to God? Our own self-will. And why is it that we have adhered to it, rather than to God's Will? Because we had not made the surrender of our self and our own will to him as we ought to have done. We have made exceptions, restrictions; our engagement has been only up to a certain point, beyond which we claimed liberty. We have, so to say, allowed God to clip the branches off self, but kept possession of the trunk and the roots. And this is what has put an obstacle and hindered God in the work of our sanctification. God wishes to have the whole being, in order to work freely in us; he has his designs, his plan drawn out, and he will bring it to perfection if nothing opposes him on our part; and nothing will oppose him if he has his own way



with our wills; if we do not keep back any part from him, but leave all to him. Nothing can be clearer than this, nor more certain.

### THIRD POINT.

It is true that to give oneself to God in this way demands extreme generosity; but even more courage and fidelity is needed, not to take back the gift. For, in the first place, it is easy to give oneself in a general way, though this should be called an offering rather than a gift; but when it comes to the point and we must really strip ourselves of everything as God exacts each thing from us, then it costs, and then it is that the difficulty of the sacrifice is felt. Nature desires to resume what has been given and regrets it, and, unless the soul is very watchful, nature will try to take back at least some part. It is no small thing to persevere in prayer in spite of dryness, temptations, desolations and apparent abandonment by God; to continue to serve him with exactness in this state; to reject all consolations from creatures; to practise exterior and interior mortifications unrelaxingly, those of the senses by privations and austerities, those of the imagination by ruling and keeping it in captivity, those of the passions by struggling against them and refusing them what they desire or subjecting them to what they fear. To mortify the mind by putting a stop to all such reasonings and reflections as are forbidden by faith and grace, by enduring patiently for years if God should cast it

into a state of blind stupidity and darkness; to mortify self-will, by contradicting its inclinations and aversions, and thinking it a good thing that others should thwart it: what courage is not needed for these things! And again, by never permitting self-will to act contrary to the divine Will, either by resisting or by acting before that Will has manifested itself; by continually adding sacrifices to sacrifices when God seems to take no heed of them nor so much as to cast a glance upon the soul: when, on the contrary, he redoubles his severity in proportion to the increase of the marks of its love—for all this heroic resolution is needed. And when the Divine jealousy relentlessly pursues self-love into its most secret recesses, what courage is needed not to take a single step back, not to hesitate, but to refuse in detail nothing of all that has been given to God in general!

In the second place, God uses unsparingly the rights which are, of course, already his own, but which he has allowed us freely to give him as if they were our own. So far, in fact, does he carry them that we are astonished at their extent, and tempted, if I may say so, to break the bargain! But there is no longer any opportunity for this, and God will not allow the soul to come to such a base withdrawal from its engagement after it has made such great advance, perhaps during many years. The soul has given in its submission, and God exercises it by degrees to the whole extent he chooses. It has given its liberty to him and now he acts as a Master, and,

without constraining it—which would be contrary to the nature of free-will—he leads the soul by the invincible force of his grace, even to the very hardest and most crucifying trials. He holds its consent; and will never let it withdraw, however it may seem to try to do so. Such is that tyranny of love of which I have spoken before; a tyranny the violence and strength of which only those know who have experience of it; which, nevertheless, they would be bitterly grieved not to feel, the heart for ever saying, in the midst of the revolts of nature, “Cut, destroy, burn; do all thou wilt, O Love, and spare me not.”

## SECOND MEDITATION

### FIRST POINT.

The soul that has truly been given to God ought not to dispose of herself in anything. God must govern it in every detail, as well for the exterior as for the interior. The soul no longer wishes to form a project, to undertake anything whatever, to change anything by her own choice in her way of living, without consulting God and being well assured that it is according to his Will. For sometimes it needs but a single false step to disarrange the designs of God upon her, the order of which, like the links of a chain, hang one upon another. A change of dwelling, a journey, a friend coming on a visit or refused, a connexion formed or broken—any of these

seeming trifles, arranged contrary to the intention of God, is enough to displace the plan of Providence, although the actual events seem, in themselves, indifferent. Now the consequences of these seemingly indifferent arrangements may be very destructive to the perfection of the soul and even fatal to its salvation. It may often be found in the lives of the Saints that their perfect conversion and their sanctification has depended on exterior circumstances guided by God's good Providence, which, in themselves, appeared matters of little importance.

Since we often see this in exterior circumstances, with much greater reason may we conclude that the soul must depend on the grace of God for all that concerns interior things, and leave him at liberty to treat her in any way that he sees best. We cannot possibly sanctify ourselves: we know not even how to set about it, it is God alone who can do the work; our part is but to second him, and not to hinder his operations. For this, of course, we must be careful to distinguish between what depends upon God and what depends also on ourselves. On God alone depends our state of prayer, consolations, drynesses, temptations and interior trials. In all these we must leave it to God to act in his own way, resting content with the state in which he has put us; neither seeking for it to change, if it is painful, nor to continue, if it is sweet. What depends on ourselves as well, is, our mortification, interior mortification above all, the practice of virtue according to our state

and occurrences, carefulness not to lose recollection, but to keep peace and tranquillity of heart, and to be of good courage when anything happens that may trouble us. To keep faithful in all this requires effort and struggle on our own part.

## SECOND POINT.

As God has appointed his ministers for the guidance of souls and given them his light and his grace for the purpose, and as it is his Will that we should apply to them and not presume to direct ourselves, as soon as a soul gives itself to God and aims at walking along the way of love, its earnest prayer ought to be that God may send to its aid a man according to his own Heart, one who will unite wisdom with zeal, an interior soul, who, guided himself by the Spirit of God, will be able to lead others according to the same Spirit. Such Directors are very rare, even in the Church of God; but there are such, and our part is to pray that one may be sent to help us. But it is very dangerous to choose according to one's own fancy in a matter so delicate and so important. We are not, of ourselves, capable of such discernment, and are only too likely to expose ourselves to deception, as indeed we should deserve to be deceived in punishment of such self-confidence. From all eternity God has chosen the soul who will be capable of leading us to him, and if we allow his Providence to act freely, he will arrange for us to come upon the guide destined by him; a secret instinct will assure us



that he is God's choice, and the effects of his direction will soon convince us that we are right in our judgement.

### THIRD POINT.

If we listen to the Voice of God, he will himself instruct us how to behave with regard to the Guide of our soul. Details would be long, and hardly suitable to a meditation. The vital point is to regard him always in a spirit of faith, as representing Jesus Christ to us, and to be firmly persuaded that as long as we consider him purely from this point of view and treat with him only in this way, God will never allow us to fall into any of those numberless inconveniences to which direction is subject, whether on the part of men or from the devil, who always does his utmost to injure the work of God.

After this admonition, the three things which direction absolutely demands on our part are openness of heart, confidence and obedience. We must hide nothing from such a guide that would give him light to know and lead us safely. Unless he can depend upon our exactitude, our candour and our sincerity, he will be uncertain and doubtful, not knowing what part to take nor how to advise us as he should. Our own tranquillity depends upon our having a perfect confidence in him, never allowing ourselves to reason or argue about his decisions, nor to keep to our own opinions contrary to his. He may be mistaken, but we ought not to presume that it is so; and even if it



should so happen, either it will be in things of little consequence, or his view will change, or, finally, God will remove him if he in any way hinders our progress. As to obedience, it is so clear that this is absolutely necessary except in case of evident sin, that we need not waste our time by stopping to prove it. With the Holy Spirit acting within and obedience directing from without, our progress along the way of love will be sure and rapid.

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### FIRST POINT.

In the practice of divine love, there are three more great rules to follow, which will be the subject of this meditation. The first is, never to allow ourselves to criticize the dealings of God in our regard. As soon as we have truly and sincerely given ourselves to him, we must respect his Infinite Majesty and not question as to the reason of the manner in which he treats us; we owe to his Infinite Wisdom to be persuaded that he cannot be mistaken in the measures he takes to assure his Glory and our sanctification; and we owe to his Infinite Goodness the belief that the severity he shows us is necessary and has our true advantage as his intention. When we give ourselves to God, what is it that we present him with? Our evils to cure, our spiritual diseases which we hardly know ourselves and of the deep causes of which

also we are ignorant; diseases which we pamper, at least in their beginning, and from which we fear to be delivered. Should not invalids of this kind consult a Physician whose knowledge, wisdom and kindness are unlimited? Ought they to be surprised when he detects maladies that have escaped their notice, that he sounds their depths and applies steel and fire if he thinks it necessary in order to destroy the very roots; and can he do this without causing them to suffer? Let us bear the pain of the operation, shutting our eyes to the means employed, and await the end before judging of what has been done to us.

The way of love is a way of faith, and is, consequently, dark and obscure; and this is exactly where the merit lies. In it we must walk blindfold, without knowing where we are or whither God is leading us. The reason can understand nothing, and the sacrifice must be made from the very beginning until the very end. It is only when the journey is over and the goal reached that we shall see clearly the reasons of the different states through which God has made us pass.

When God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son, the child of promise, from whom the expected Messiah was to descend; if Abraham had argued about an order in appearance so contrary to the law of nature; if he had tried to reconcile the command with the predictions that had been made to him; if he had consulted his feelings as a father; if, finally, he had asked what had his son done to be treated so

cruelly, or he, himself, that he must be the executioner—his great sacrifice which was so glorious for God, so acceptable in his Eyes that he rewarded it that same hour by renewing his Covenant even with an oath, and promising his special protection to Abraham and to his seed; that sacrifice would not have been made; Abraham would have rendered himself unworthy of the title Father of the Faithful; he would have left that Way of Faith in which he had hitherto been walking; he would have fallen short of perfection, and we cannot tell what further unhappy effects would have followed the disobedience caused by his reasoning—a reasoning very false and vain, but very tempting and specious.

## SECOND POINT.

The second rule regards ourselves. The same reason that forbids all private judgement as to the way God leads us, forbids also that we should curiously inquire into and judge of our own state, as to what progress we make and whether God is pleased with us. In all such questionings and introversions there is always a large share of self-love; and besides, we run a risk of deceiving ourselves, either because presumption inclines us to flatter ourselves and make us think ourselves better than we really are, or cowardice casts us down and concludes that we are in a bad state.

Let us be satisfied with two witnesses who can neither deceive nor be deceived. The first is God,

in moments when we stand well with him; and the second is our Director. God will never fail to reassure the soul when it is really necessary either in order to support it, or to encourage it to proceed. When God does not do this himself, either it is not necessary for the soul, or else he wishes it to have recourse to him who holds his place in its regard. Simplicity may sometimes induce a soul to seek assurances from God, and then, since the inspiration to do so has been sent by him, he will not refuse to grant them. But by far most generally it is curiosity that prompts, or a lack of self-abandonment, or the repugnance that the soul feels to forget itself and lose itself in God. The same thing happens when the Director is asked often and eagerly as to the state of the soul, and obliged to answer the same questions and say the same thing a hundred times over !

It is not when we are beginners that we feel this need of being reassured as to our state, nor is it in the early stages of the spiritual life that we think of asking for it. For then the sweet peace we enjoy, and which scarcely ever deserts us, leaves us no room to doubt that we are pleasing to God. But when that quits us, perhaps for a long while, when drynesses, desolations and temptations assail us, we begin to fear lest, perhaps, we are not in the good way, or to examine ourselves anxiously, or try to make sure of our state; that is to say, we fear to enter upon the dark and narrow way of faith and pure love. It is very dangerous at such times to form any opinion of

one's own state, since the soul is troubled, and the probability is that we shall give ear rather to our imaginations or self-love or the devil, than to the voice of reason, or of our Director and God himself !

Take for an invariable rule, that, in such circumstances, you must not judge yourself. This rule will be your peace and your safeguard. It is infallible in itself, and God never fails to bless it.

### THIRD POINT.

The third rule is not to be terrified by any danger, any temptation or any apparent abandonment on the part of God. I know that this rule is more easy to propose than to follow. Nevertheless it must be generously adhered to, being certain that, with the help of God, a good will is invincible. What will not the devil do, acting in concert with self-love, to draw us out of the way ! He will represent to us the most frightful precipices of sin and sacrilege, and will try to deprive us of the help of our guide by shaking our confidence in him, and making us believe that he will make us lose our soul. What ought I to do, beset by so many and such violent temptations that I am not sure if I have not consented—indeed, am almost sure that I have done so ?

To this question there is but the one answer and the same advice already given. On no account can you judge this for yourself, but depend implicitly on the judgement of your Director. This alone is not enough: you must rise superior to these fears, scorn them;

treat them with contempt and make a law to yourself to reject them even more forcibly than the temptations themselves, for these are even more dangerous. Whatever the Director may say, the poor soul is not set at rest, and he tells her to go to Communion. Now, the fear, the horror of committing a sacrilege takes possession of her. But no matter, she must summon enough courage to obey, notwithstanding that her fears increase up to the moment of the communion. It is true that, no sooner is Jesus Christ received, than all these pains disappear, leaving the soul free and tranquil with him. But what does it not cost to make the effort—the first times most of all! If the soul gives way, the devil has got what he wanted and takes the rule of her will. After that, the soul feels obliged to yield to him, or almost to die in the effort to overcome him at last.

And what must be done when the devil makes us fear that our spiritual guide is leading us on to destruction? Redouble your confidence in him, and, if need be, even go so far as to say:

“Very well! even if he wreck my soul, yet I will obey.”<sup>1</sup>

This seems an extreme act of confidence, but it is absolutely the only way to triumph over the devil, and it is to this extremity that God wills to lead a generous soul who has devoted herself to his love.

<sup>1</sup> In the original in the Old French the passage runs thus:

“Hé bien, qu’il me perde, pourvû que j’obéisse.”



Then will be perfectly verified that saying of our Lord, "He that shall lose his life for my sake, shall find it."<sup>1</sup>

But if, on the contrary, we profess to save it by listening to our excited and disturbed imagination, refusing to go to Communion and insisting on changing our Director, we shall be leaving the way of love, renouncing perfection, and, under pretext of assuring our salvation, we shall run a very probable risk of losing it altogether.

God only pushes those souls on whom he has great designs to such extremities. But since he has inspired me to abandon myself totally to him by the way of love, I ought not to except anything, nor to look forward, but simply to be ready for everything.

Yes, O God—I consent to go forward, if such is thy good pleasure, neither to know what my state is now, or what it shall be in the future, in order that by this sacrifice I may attain to the pure love of Thee.

## CONSIDERATION

### ON INTERIOR MORTIFICATION

Interior mortification consists in nothing else than the continual renunciation of self which Jesus Christ expects from his followers; and as love alone could

<sup>1</sup> St. Matt. xvi 25.

induce anyone to embrace such a life, so, of all the means by which to maintain it, love is the shortest and at the same time the most efficacious to advance us in the way of holy love. Everything in us by nature is contrary to the love of God; therefore self must be denied and renounced in every way. This war against self that we undertake is a very long battle which ends only with our life; it is a hard and painful struggle in which we must always be on our guard and warring against self without making either truce or peace with nature. This is a grievous struggle, for we cannot tear out the roots of self-love without extreme suffering; nor is it possible to foresee or calculate the extent of this suffering. But, in truth, there is no middle way: we must renounce ourselves in everything, entirely; for, if we put any limits to our self-denial, we put bounds also to our fulfilment of the great command of love.

On the other hand, if interior mortification is hard and terrifying in itself, yet in its effects it is sweet and very full of consolation.

What can be sweeter to a loving soul, than to see the love of God growing in proportion to the destruction of self-love? What can be more consoling than to be able to say, "The love of God found such and such an obstacle in me; but it finds it no longer, for I have cast it out"? Pagan philosophy proposed nothing greater or higher for its wisdom than that a man should raise himself above his passions and gain the mastery over himself; but Christian philosophy

presents a far more elevated standard, and, as this exacts much more difficult victories from him, so does it enable him to gather, even in this life, far more delicious fruits. For there is no felicity on earth to be compared with the pure happiness of a Christian, who, after long struggles, has succeeded in firmly establishing the empire of divine love in his heart, by trampling under him his enemies, which are his passions, his inclinations, the evils natural to his character, self-love and self-will. In such a man there is no opposition to doing what is right; he feels an attraction to good, and finds a marvellous facility in doing it; he has no fear now of not guarding himself against evil, for a horror of and shrinking from it has become like a second nature in him; he enjoys perfect freedom, since he depends only upon grace, to which he no longer opposes any resistance. Indifferent, and as it were dead to all else, he lives in God alone and cares only for the interests of God. Is it not worth any suffering and any labour, to be able to enjoy such a happy state of freedom?

And observe here, that this happiness begins the very moment when we give ourselves seriously to the work of interior mortification; it grows in proportion to the progress made, and does not reach its full until the soul has carried mortification to the utmost perfection in its power. Thus, it has not to wait to receive the reward of its toil; joy follows immediately on the labour.

I must add here, that love, which ordains morti-

fication, has the virtue of sweetening it; if, indeed, it does not take from it all its rigour, yet it certainly insensibly lessens it, so that at last the very labour of mortification comes to be loved, although at first abhorred. This love has its moments of consolation which are so delightful that the soul is well pleased to have gained, so to say, a right to it, by the austerity of mortification. And when the moment of sweetness is over, the strength of love is so increased that it easily overcomes the most violent repugnances of nature.

Again, God does not let the enemy bring up all his forces against us at once. One by one they meet us; first he makes us face those which are the easiest to overcome, and keeps the most formidable until we have grown strong by frequent battles. As the fight becomes hotter, he gives us larger supplies of strength in such a way that the last victories cost us even less than the first.

So that we see it is not, properly speaking, we ourselves who fight, but grace which fights for us. God puts himself at our head and throws down all our enemies to the ground. All he asks of us is a determined will to face the foe, then to invoke his aid, to arm ourselves with the "*sword of the Spirit*," and shelter ourselves behind the "*shield of Faith*."

O God! it is true that mortification only frightens cowards who are so because they depend upon themselves and lack confidence in thee. I have been one of these cowards up to the present, but I will be so no

longer. I am resolved to attack all in myself that is opposed to thy love. Thou knowest the measure of love which thou dost expect from me; I can only fulfil it by a corresponding amount of self-denial. My determination is fixed. But I can do nothing except by thy help. Strengthen my weakness; I begin very late. Make up, O Lord, make up for all these years that I have lost; thou canst do this, and thou wilt ! It will be my own fault if thou shalt have to reproach me with not having loved thee in time, and so with not loving thee in eternity as much as thou desirest I should do, and as much as I ought to do.

## EIGHTH DAY

### *ON LOVE OF SELF*

#### FIRST MEDITATION

##### FIRST POINT.

After so many meditations on the love of God, we are now in a position to recognize love of self, and see clearly the necessity of hating and of destroying it.

Every intelligent being, capable of happiness necessarily loves itself. If he can find his perfection and felicity in himself, the love which he has for himself will be a love of complaisance, and such is the love which God has for himself: he is the only Being who can thus love himself.

If a being is drawn from nothingness and owes to some other whatever perfection it may have, and cannot itself suffice for its own happiness, it is evident that such a being cannot find in itself any reason or grounds for loving itself with a love of complacency, and that it can only have that love, lawfully and solidly, for the One who drew it from its original nothingness, from whom it derives all that it is or has, from whom it expects its ultimate felicity and who is, consequently, its supreme Good. In attaching myself to God, this



is the kind of love for myself which is not only permitted, but commanded; because, he being supremely lovable in himself and the source of all the good that there is in me, the possession of him is the only thing that can make me happy, and thus, in loving him, I do also love myself. No created being has any right to love itself in any other way, and this love of myself, being properly understood and duly regulated, is not sinful self-love.

Self-love consists in this, that the creature, looking with complacency on itself, loves itself for itself alone, without any reference to God; but, on the contrary, presumes to refer God to itself as its centre. This is ill-regulated love, and is the principle of all vice and all sin in us.

Self-love is the enemy of God; his enemy in everything, and his unreconcilable enemy. God wills absolutely to be loved by us in himself and for himself; this is his own right and no one can dispute it with him. He cannot endure that a creature should love itself in itself and for itself. If it entertain love of this kind, even in a small degree, it becomes culpable in the Eyes of God, because it is an injury to the love due to God, and, if it should be carried so far as to become rebellion and open disobedience, then the soul falls to a criminal state, and is deserving of the hatred of God; because it loves itself more than it loves him and deliberately prefers self to God. This is what St Augustine calls "the love of self carried so far as to despise God," instead of which

it is right to "carry the love of God so far as to despise self."

Self-love is, thus, directly opposed to the great commandment to love God. If it opposes it only in things of small consequence and without reflection and full deliberation, it constitutes a venial sin, or, more or less, an imperfection. If it opposes the love of God in any considerable matter, with reflection and full deliberation, it is a mortal sin. And as all sin is essentially hateful to God, he hates also self-love, which is the cause of sin; and if he perceives it, even in a small degree, in a soul, however holy in other respects it may be, he cannot admit that soul to the full enjoyment of his Presence, until it has been completely purified.

#### SECOND POINT.

Love of Self being the enemy of the love of God, it is evidently the enemy of that right and well-ordered love which we ought to have for ourselves. Reason and faith equally concur in making it a duty for us to love our True Good, our sole and supreme Good; and both one and the other teach us that that Good is God. And faith further teaches me that if during this life I live in the way that is commanded, I shall see him, love him, and possess him eternally, which will make me supremely happy. But self-love, fixing my love on my self, which is not and cannot possibly be my chief Good, turns me away from loving him who really is the supreme Good, and exposes me to the

danger of being for ever deprived of the enjoyment of him; and it is certain that I shall never enter into that complete possession and felicity as long as any germ of self-love subsists in me. Thus my greatest interest in this world lies in being delivered from it completely, since on this all my happiness depends.

### THIRD POINT.

Self-love considered under this double view, viz., as enemy to God and enemy to myself, is supremely deserving of hatred; and as neither God nor I, myself, have any other enemy, so it is the only thing that, properly speaking, deserves his hatred, or mine. Why is it that God hates sin? and why ought I to hate it? Because it is the offspring of self-love. Why is hell a place of torment and horror? Because it is the punishment of self-love. Why does God show such severity to the souls in Purgatory, souls whom he loves and who love him? Because he still sees in them the vestiges of self-love, and will not spare them until these are completely purified away. Rightly ordered reason has always condemned self-love; as may be seen in the writings of the ancient philosophers, although, whilst condemning it, they well understood neither its nature nor the greatness of the disorder.

Religion has made it part of our duty to combat love of self. All Christian morality may be reduced to this point, and the strict and indispensable obligation thus imposed on us is, to my mind, the most

convincing reason for admiring, loving and submitting to the teaching of Christian morals. It could not be from God, it could not be beneficial to man, nay, this morality would be false, and fall short of its object, which is to obtain for God the Glory which is his right, and for me the happiness which I can only receive from him, if it made any compromise with self-love, if it allowed me to humour it the least in the world, if it did not command me to pursue it without mercy, alike for the honour of God and for my own advantage.

## SECOND MEDITATION

### FIRST POINT.

Self-love has its source in the fundamental and radical imperfection of the creature, which is nothing else than a capacity to esteem itself by appropriating the goods and gifts which it has received from God to its own self, pleasing itself in the enjoyment of them, and disposing of them just as it likes.

Since sin entered into the world, that which, in an innocent creature, was but a simple capacity, has become a vicious inclination, which shows itself in us even in our early infancy, and which has grown to be a strong force, before we are in a state to remark and resist it. Reason has hardly dawned when it feels the disorder and injustice of self-love, and is covered with shame at so odious a thing, but, instead

of setting to work to overcome, thinks only of how to hide it, and soon is so blinded and seduced that the soul only tries to dissimulate it, and deceive herself and justice also. Besides, reason is now too weak to overcome it, and if she triumphs over it in one point, it is only by giving way on another, perhaps more important, so that the victories gained over self-love in some gross temptation are merely at the cost of a defeat in others of a more refined nature. Thus the pagan sages scorned this world's good and were very proud of themselves for doing so, esteeming their own virtue very highly: looking on the acquisition of moral virtues as their own work, and weakening one vice at the expense of strengthening another. Many worldly Christians do the same every day. Reason alone knows not, cannot know how to put an end to self-love, unless she is powerfully aided by grace; and even so, must carefully study what Christian perfection really is. If I wish to be firmly convinced of this, I must reflect here for a while on myself, and ask myself, If I have cured myself of self-love on some particular point, have I my own human reason and my own natural reflections to thank for it? Not at all. If there still remains much love of self in me, and much more than I know of, is it not caused by my want of attention to the voice of grace, and by my infidelity in not following it?

When did I begin to find out that self-love reigns in my thoughts, my intentions and actions? Surely it is since I made the resolution to serve God better,

and, with his help, to keep closer guard over myself. If I had given myself more unreservedly to him, I should have made many other discoveries; I should have received more abundant lights by which to know myself, and much greater and more numerous graces by which to overcome the fatal enemy.

#### SECOND POINT.

Self-love has two branches: that of the *mind*, and that of the *will*. Self-love of the mind makes me jealous of my own excellence, whilst that of the will makes me aspire to independence. Nor does this inclination of my mind lead me to prefer myself to other creatures alone; but in a thousand circumstances it leads me to prefer my own judgement before that of God, to argue or find something to argue about in his commands. And this, sometimes in what he tells me to believe or to practise, sometimes in the general conduct of his providence or in his personal conduct of myself. If this preference that I have for my own judgement does not always go so far as to be a sin, it is never excusable, and is always the growth of an insupportable pride, a pride that is to be found in almost all my thoughts if I examine them as in the Sight of God, by the help of his light and according to the precepts of the Gospel.

Self-will desires to be master in everything, and will not endure to be contradicted in anything. It is angry with the Divine precepts if they interfere with its own liberty, with the arrangements of Provi-



dence if they do not fall in with its own wishes and plans; it would make God himself submit, and only bends to his dominion when absolutely compelled to do so. It refuses to God everything that it can refuse without punishment, and scarcely gives way even before his most terrible threats. Hell is peopled through self-love of the mind and self-will, and they have obliged God to enlarge the purifying fires of Purgatory, without which, indeed, Heaven would be closed against almost all Christians ! For there are hardly any in whom, at death, self-love of the mind and of the will are quite extinct.

From this we must conclude that the chief battle-field on which self-love is to be attacked should be considered the intellect and the will; the one to be taken captive by the Spirit of God, the other to be subjected to the Divine Will, not only in essential points and such as are of rigorous obligation, but absolutely in all things. Let us study, above all, to cultivate two virtues, humility and obedience. Humility breaks down presumption, vanity and intellectual pride; Obedience makes supple the stiffness of the will and accustoms it to the yoke of authority. These virtues are the two great branches of interior mortification, and self-love is quite overcome or can do very little indeed in a soul that is truly humble and obedient.

This shows us how considerable the advantage of interior mortification is, over that which is exterior. The latter attacks only the flesh, directly, and does

not always succeed even in crushing its revolts; whilst not only can it subsist where pride is, but sometimes strengthens that vice. Examples of this are by no means rare. But interior mortification directs all its blows against self-love, and in weakening that, it diminishes also the violence of the sensual appetites, the rebellion of the senses being nothing else but a humiliating punishment of the revolt of the intellect against God.

### THIRD POINT.

The Love of God and self-love are like the two weights in a balance, balancing one against the other. One must go down and the other will rise; and by taking one away altogether, you give the preponderance to the other. The surest test by which you may know if the love of God dominates you, and to what point, is to observe what your habitual disposition is in regard to self-love, whether you give it no quarter the moment you perceive it, if you are a zealous spy upon all its movements, if you study all its ruses, its "*ins and outs*"; if you are really well content when God humbles you, either by himself, by the schemes of men, or by the wiles of the devil. It is a good sign that we love God well when we are full of scorn and hatred of ourselves, and put little value on being esteemed and loved by others. For the human heart cannot live without love, and when it does not love itself with the kind of love condemned by our Lord Jesus Christ, it is a sure proof that it loves God. I know that self-

love is so subtle that we are always open to illusions on all that regards it, and also, that we can never have *perfect* assurance as to whether it has more or less empire over us. But without reflecting on it overmuch, or becoming disquieted (which would be a result of the very same enemy), a simple and straightforward soul will rely upon God on so difficult and delicate a question. She will pray him not to spare her, and to teach her not to spare herself; in his presence she will peacefully sound all the depths and folds of her heart; and at the least defect, the slightest imperfection shown to her by the Divine light, she will immediately remedy the fault, owning herself in the wrong and begging the grace to correct it in future.

### THIRD MEDITATION

#### FIRST POINT.

That coarse kind of self-love which exposes us to fall into gross faults is easy to perceive even for a soul that loves God very little, for the conscience gives a strong reminder that it is a criminal thing for one's own sake or pleasure totally to disregard the commands of God. He who should undertake to justify himself in such a case must be in bad faith, and even his conscience would take the part of God against him, nor would he be able to silence that voice.

But in reproaching oneself for grave sins, in accusing oneself and even in doing penance for them, one does not reach the cause, nor attack the evil at the root. From this comes it that we have many relapses and are in constant danger of falling again. It is impossible to know the exact point up to which it is necessary to make war upon self-love in order to avoid falling into mortal sin. For this reason it is that those who purposely indulge self-love in matters that appear of small moment, almost always end in the long run by indulging it in matters of really serious importance; which made our Lord Jesus Christ pronounce that terrible sentence against the lukewarm: "Because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my Mouth."<sup>1</sup> "I will take away insensibly the habit of my love; and at last you will lose it altogether." This dreadful consequence of want of earnestness is always to be feared by a Christian, whatever progress he may previously have made, if he voluntarily spares self-love on any point on which God presses him to attack it. Saul, when he began to reign, had the Spirit of God, and the Scriptures say of him that "he would be changed into another man." He spared part of the Amalekites and their flocks, when he had been expressly commanded to destroy them utterly. The Divine Spirit withdrew from him and he was rejected without hope. This example is a very striking one; self-love is that Amalekite which God commands us to pursue until

<sup>1</sup> Apoc. iii 16.

it is utterly extinct. If, in anything whatever, we spare it, we are threatened by the same punishment as Saul.

#### SECOND POINT.

That self-love which is refined and delicate, although it makes us commit an innumerable crowd of venial sins, is by no means easy to discover. It fills our minds with a thousand false prejudices against the nature and obligations of Christian holiness. It nourishes in our hearts natural inclinations and repugnances, voluntary attachments and aversions which the Gospel commands us to fight against and to break through. It makes us live, if not in actual sin, at least in cowardice and imperfection. But it is not easy to detect, so subtle and adroit is it in disguising itself, so clever in excusing or at least in justifying itself. The greater number of Christians pay no attention to this, and as they only recognize self-love by its effects, when these effects are not so considerable it never enters their heads that they are really eaten up by it, and that it governs all their conduct. How many men and women are there, thorough slaves to self-love, never dreaming that they are so ! Everyone who lives with them knows it quite well ; they are the only people who never suspect it. How many men are governed by their own will, by their character, jealous to excess of their authority, and slaves to self-will, to which they wish to make everyone submit !

If you tell them that they are following their self-love and that nature hourly overcomes grace with them, what will they reply? They will say that they are made like that, and that it is not for them to remodel themselves; or else they will deny it altogether. The most sincere among them admit that they do not believe it is necessary to push the war against self so far as all that, and that, in any case, they have not the courage to undertake it.

But, nevertheless, we must have the courage, we must incessantly crave it from God, we must make the attempt and never let ourselves be discouraged if we really *will* that the love of God shall take the place of self-love in us.

### THIRD POINT.

Whatever may be our natural penetration of mind, whatever our delicacy of feeling, with whatever attention and care we may study the movements of our heart in order to cleanse it from self-love, we shall never perfectly succeed unless we are enlightened in our need by the Divine Light; and, when we have come to know how large a share the love of self has in us, we shall never have the strength to fight against it everywhere and drive it from its last entrenchments unless God shall give us his Strength

In order sincerely to desire to have this light and this force, in order even to make it the object of our most ardent prayers, in order to make use of it in proportion as God gives it, we must be firmly, abso-



lutely resolved to fulfil the command to love God with all our strength; we must abandon ourselves to be led entirely by grace, with the resolution to follow its leadings inviolably. Where are the Christians who have taken this generous resolution? They are very few! May I have the happiness to be one of them, O God! and may this be the fruit of my Retreat!

And yet I know that, with all my goodwill, with all my care and all my efforts, I shall never succeed in completely killing my love of myself. This work is thine alone, this total death to self-love, which is the consummation of sanctity, and to which thou canst only put the last touch by trials. For these I dare not offer myself—to wish to undertake the least of them would be temerity, since I know that, of myself, I could not bear a single one. But, O God! if, in order to destroy in me this enemy of thy love, thou hast destined some trial for me, grant me the grace to accept it when it shall come, and the strength to support it even to the end. Do not allow me, above all, to render myself unworthy, and thy designs upon me ineffectual by my want of fidelity in corresponding to thy grace and want of courage in doing violence to myself.

## CONSIDERATION

## ON CROSSES

Crosses are the great means employed by God himself to destroy self-love in us, and to increase and purify our love of him; whilst on our side we work at these two objects by diligently making use of the means he leaves at our disposition. It is by crosses that the work is finished; without them it must remain imperfect. And the reason of this is clear.

Self cannot put itself to death; the death-stroke must come from another, and *self* must remain purely passive in receiving it. So long as I act, I am living, and I can well mortify myself, but by my own efforts I can never *kill* self spiritually. I can detach myself from all those things to which I cling; but to divide myself from myself and really tear out self, this is not in my own power. The work must be undertaken by God, so that it shall be he who acts upon me, and that the fire of his love shall consume the victim.

There are so many kinds of crosses that it is impossible to count them, and the same crosses are capable of being varied in infinite ways. They change according to the character, according to circumstances, according to degree. Some are simply painful, others are humiliating; others, again, unite pain with shamefulness. Some attack a man through his possessions, or through persons dear to him, or through his health, his honour, and even through his life.

Others attack him in his spiritual interests, in what affects the state of his conscience, in what regards his eternal salvation; and these are, beyond comparison, the most searching, the most destructive to self-love, and the most difficult to bear. There are crosses that come from men, and others that the devil has power to thrust upon us, others that God himself lays upon us. All are effectual in a way that interior mortification could never achieve, and without them it is useless to hope to attain to any high degree of sanctity.

Crosses have two great advantages with regard to the destruction of self-love. The first is, that they are not of our own choosing. Self-love has always some part in whatever we impose on ourselves, such as austerities, for instance. Our own will made us take them up and it sustains us in them; and we find in them a subtle complaisance which leads us to look upon them as a source of merit with God. We feel as if we can say to him, "It is *I* who give thee this. I deprive myself of so and so, I suffer such and such of my own free-will for love of thee. I am not obliged to do so; it is pure generosity on my part, which must be very pleasing to thee." It is not so with crosses given by Providence. They fall heavily on our shoulders, when we are not thinking of them at all. Far from choosing them, our first movement is to throw them off; and it is only painfully that the will submits, not being able to get rid of them. Thus the soul has no temptation to look upon that submission as a merit before God, which is, in a sense,

the effect of necessity. On the contrary, the soul feels her want of courage and is humbled by it, and by the complaints and impatience and murmurs which escape from her, and of which she is ashamed after having made so many fine protestations to God. And further, since these crosses are not of her own choosing, she finds in herself no strength to bear them, but is obliged to have recourse humbly to God and expect help from him alone, rendering homage to his grace that she has not succumbed under them. Self-love can find nothing here in which to glorify.

The second advantage of crosses is, that God, whether sending them clearly from himself or in any way whatever that he may permit, always strikes on the most tender part, and drives in the sword just so far as he knows is necessary to kill self-love on that point; and he will repeat and continue the crucifying work until his end is attained. Thus, provided we do not interfere and hinder by the cowardice of our will whilst he works, success is certain. That which shows that God aims at the weak part that he knows of and we ignore, is that usually we would rather have any other cross than the one that is actually put upon us; everything about it hurts and afflicts nature, which cries out aloud under the burden, unless excess of pain keeps us silent. It was just on that spot that the blow ought to fall, because, there, nature was very much alive, self-love is deeply wounded, and, if it had its way and had aimed the blow, it would have directed it anywhere else, since in any other part it

would have suffered less. So much for ordinary crosses.

But as to those which are outside of the common order, which are much rarer and are the sign of some great design on the part of God, all that is well to say about them here is, that he generally makes use of such crosses as horrible temptations against purity, faith, hope and charity, and thus makes war himself on self-love, which he pursues with implacable wrath wherever it may have taken refuge. He allows it no footing anywhere, until at last he has completely banished it from the heart which he will have to be wholly and solely his own.

Since crosses are the greatest and most powerful destroyers of self-love, and the most effectual means to establish the reign of divine love in the heart, my duty is to esteem and value them, to cherish, and, if God so inspires me, to desire them; to await them at least in peace, to receive them with submission, to bear them with patience and resignation, and to place all my happiness here below in glorifying God by this greatest possible feature of resemblance to Jesus Christ. Amen.





A SHORT TREATISE ON THE GIFT  
OF SELF TO GOD



## ON THE GIFT OF SELF TO GOD

THE intention of God is that every Christian, as soon as he has the use of reason, should give, consecrate and devote himself to him in all the plenitude of his heart; thus ratifying the offering which was made of him at his Baptism.

Very few Christians, when they begin to know God and to reflect, make this donation of themselves to him. The greater number, even of those who make a profession of piety, all their lives remain in ignorance of what it means thus to give themselves to God; when you speak of it to them and suggest that they should do so, as being essential to a Christian, they do not relish what you say; for they cannot resolve to make so great a sacrifice, which includes all others. They are very pleased to trace out a plan of devotion for themselves, according to their own ideas and not according to those of God; a plan by which they will follow grace *up to a certain point*, but not abandon themselves to it absolutely and in all things. In all that is not touched by an express command or in which they have not made an act of voluntary submission, they believe they have the right to dispose of themselves as they will, and that God does not wish to constrain them to the

point of depending on him in every detail of their conduct.

If there are few who make this entire donation of self to God, there are still fewer who persevere in it and fully accomplish it. After having made the deed of gift they soon take it back again, and govern themselves more or less at the fancy of their own self-love and self-will. To be always in dependence on God costs nature too much; they loosen the yoke little by little, and relax, today in one thing, tomorrow in another; sometimes they shake it off altogether. This is how many souls are lost, and many others only enter Heaven after having endured a long and terrible Purgatory; the number of saints is small.

By saints I mean those who, at any age (whether they have always kept their innocence, or whether they have lost it and even have lived some time in habitual sin), have given themselves to God at last, seriously, and have fulfilled to the utmost of their power the designs of perfection which he had for them.

Of all the subjects of Christian morality, this is unquestionably the most important; it is the foundation of the whole edifice, and by this we must begin. For my part, I do not see how in any other way we can be true disciples of Jesus Christ. Too much stress cannot be laid upon this, for, if well understood, it will throw light on all else. We must ask God that he will himself teach and enlighten us on the matter; and with a docile heart we will read the following reflections.

## I

## WHAT DOES THE GIFT OF SELF TO GOD MEAN?

Giving oneself to God means the consecrating to him of all our thoughts, affections and actions in such a way that the mind is occupied with him alone, or such objects as he may wish us to attend to at each moment; that the heart loves him supremely, and creatures in view of him according to the order which he has himself established; that all that we do, all we suffer, we refer to him; and that his glory, his good pleasure, may be our last end and principal intention.

To give myself to God means to renounce guiding myself, and to follow in all things the leadings of grace; it is to have no self-will over anything at all, but to will only that which God wills; it is to give up to him my liberty, in order that he may dispose of and direct me just as he wills and according to his good pleasure.

The Christian who has given himself to God does not belong to himself any longer; he has no further right over himself, but leaves himself in the Hands of God and of those who hold his place; he does not form any wish, any plan, or undertake any enterprise by the mere movement of his own spirit. In a word, he has gone under the dominion of God; he keeps his eyes always upon God to know the least sign of his Will and holds himself ever in readiness to execute it

without reasoning or arguing or making any excuse, without opposing his own inclinations or natural repugnances. At first sight such absolute dependence seems frightening, and that it holds the soul in insupportable constraint. We shall go on to see how God softens this yoke, and how love renders it delightful.

## II

REASONS FOR THE GIFT OF SELF TO GOD—FIRST  
REASON: NOTHING IS MORE JUST

Without allowing ourselves to give way to vain imaginations which experience contradicts, let us begin by examining the reasons that would induce us to give ourselves thus to God. These reasons are innumerable, and it would be too much to examine all; I will confine myself to the chief. Is it not supremely just that I should give myself entirely, unreservedly to him who drew me out of nothing, and who every moment preserves the existence which he gave, who is my First Beginning and my Last End, my sovereign Good, from whom I have received all I have, from whom I expect all, and without whom it is impossible for me to be happy? What need has God of me? None whatever. Whether I exist or not, whether I give myself to him or not, he will be none the less happy. Why, then, does he insist that I should be entirely devoted to him? Because right reason and order demand it. Because God would



not authorize me to remain my own master, nor to give myself to any other than to himself alone.

If I pretend to have the right to dispose of myself just as I please, I am a usurper, and steal from God that which belongs to him; if I were to give myself to any other, it could only be to some creature, and justice would alike prevent me from giving and the creature from receiving such a gift, and I should do God the greatest of all outrages, that of preferring something else to him!

But if it is just that I belong to God, it is just that I should be his in everything and for ever. I could not, justly, withdraw from his dominion in any point or at any time. His rights extend to all that I am, in whatever state or in whatever circumstance I may find myself. He has created me for himself alone, nor could he have created me for any other end. I abuse his gift of my mind, if I employ it for any other end than to know him: I misuse my heart, if I do not pour out all my love on him; I misuse my liberty, if I make use of it in any other way than to please him in everything; I misuse all the faculties of my body and my soul, if I do not employ them all conformably to his intentions. It is not enough that I would not offend him; I must make it my study to please him, to delight him, and, consequently, in everything to do as he wishes, *to do his Will*. Nothing is left to my own disposal, any more than it is to the angels or to the Blessed in Heaven. Has not Jesus Christ taught

us to say to our Heavenly Father, "Thy Will be done on earth, as it is in Heaven"? In Heaven can there be any moment, any occasion when his Will is not perfectly accomplished? We are, by our very prayer, obliged to fulfil it as constantly and as entirely on earth. All the difference between the Blessed and ourselves consists in this, that they are no longer able to withdraw from this fidelity, being fixed in the state of perfection, whilst we, here below, have always the unhappy possibility of rebelling. However, it is our indispensable duty to have no other rule than the divine Will, just as much as it is also theirs.

If, therefore, I consult my reason and my conscience, if I consult my religion and my faith, if I consider who God is in himself and what relation he bears to me, there results a law that I should give myself all to God and God only. All unite to teach me that this is my first and greatest obligation.

### III

#### SECOND REASON: I CAN ONLY BE HAPPY BY GIVING MYSELF TO GOD

God being my Supreme Good, there can be no happiness for me, either in this life or in that which is to come, except by my union with him. But here below, where I can only know him by faith, what other union can I have with him except by giving myself to him so that I can never be separated from

him; except by devoting my mind and my heart to him, so that I may be one with him by conformity of affections and ideas? For it is in this conformity that spiritual union consists. He has given me the gift of discernment and liberty, so that, knowing what he is and what my position is with regard to him, I may attach myself to him solely and absolutely, by my own enlightened choice. His intention is that this gift of myself, being by my free choice, should be glorious to him and meritorious to me; that is to say, that, glorifying him by a love of preference, and beginning even in this life to be happy through this love, I shall merit to glorify him for ever in Heaven, and to find there the consummation of my happiness, in the consummation of my love.

In Holy Scripture he says to me, "My son, give me thy heart."<sup>1</sup> All that he wishes for from me is contained in this gift; which, indeed, comprehends all; which is the sole thing of which he is jealous, and without which, all else I should offer would be as nothing to him. "Give me this heart, which I have made for myself, which I alone can fill, which by its deepest desires sighs only for me, and which can never know peace or joy apart from me. It belongs to me, and to none other, but to me alone; and all its greatness and nobleness lies in this, that every other being except me could not suffice for it." God does not ask it for any advantage it will be to him, but for our own advantage solely. He has no need of us,

<sup>1</sup> Prov. xxiii 26.

but we could not subsist apart from him. He is supremely happy in himself, and I can never know happiness apart from him.

Can I be my own happiness? No; in myself I find nothing but emptiness, and this cannot surprise me, since I am a creature drawn out of nothing. Can other creatures, or all the created goods of the universe, make me happy? They cannot. They are all drawn from nothingness like myself, and are as empty in their depths as I am. If I should possess them all and for ever, my heart would be none the less empty, none the less starved for lack of the True Good, the Sovereign Good, which is none other than God. Until this heart belong entirely to God, it will have no rest, but is always yearning after something, always regretting something. On the contrary, as soon as it possesses God it is satisfied, joyful and tranquil; it is no more subject to weary longings which gnaw, devour and consume him who does not place all his happiness in God.

But the human heart can never possess God until it is possessed itself by God. God gives himself in proportion as the gift of self is made to him—ALL FOR ALL.

#### IV

#### THIRD REASON: I HAVE ONLY THE PRESENT TIME IN WHICH TO DISPOSE OF MYSELF

I must not say, "I will give myself to God when I like; there is no hurry about it; I have plenty of time

yet to think of it." Such words are equally false and foolish. They are false; for the only time I can ever have in which to give myself to God is my present life, so short, so uncertain ! I cannot promise myself a month, a day, not even an hour ; I have only power over the present moment. If I do not make my resolution at this moment, can I be sure that I shall do so in the following ? Shall I be still alive ? At this instant grace calls me loudly ; if I refuse and fail grace now, will not grace fail me and refuse to help me when I call ? Is grace given me at my own discretion, for me to use just when I please ? Tomorrow it will be no easier for me than it is today. If I put off now, perhaps I shall never do it. Besides, is it not very foolish to defer from day to day to start on the way of true happiness ? to refuse to do, when God presses me, that which I shall only regret not having done sooner ? Why should I reduce myself to say, some day, as did St Augustine, " Too late have I begun to love thee, O Beauty ever ancient, ever new ; too late have I begun to love thee ! "

Alas ! even in giving myself now to thee, O God ! I have this reproach to make ! Why should I aggravate it by fresh delays and render it more bitter ? How painful and grievous such a reproach is to a heart that Divine Love has wounded ! If Love has done me the great grace of thus wounding my heart, let me at least receive it instantly, and, in gratitude for this sweetest of wounds, let me return it by giving up all.

Truly, we do not know how great a wrong we do to ourselves by not giving ourselves entirely to God !

## V

FOURTH REASON: THE ONLY WAY IN WHICH I CAN  
GLORIFY GOD, IS BY GIVING UP MY WHOLE SELF  
TO HIM

God created me for his Glory; this is the chief end he proposed in doing so, and it is, also, the chief that I ought to have in serving him. But in what other way can I glorify him, except by completely giving myself up to him ?

That which redounds most to his glory is not that which I do of my own choice to glorify him, but that which he does himself in me and by me. He only asks from me an absolute devotion, a disposition to obey without any limit, which refuses nothing to him, resists him in nothing, but lets him exercise his dominion over me just as he wills. He is glorified by me as he wishes when he holds me always in his Hand and finds me pliable to his Will in everything. Whether I do great things for him or small, is a matter of indifference to him, provided only that I do as he wills. His Will alone gives to everything its value, and the doing of it is the only thing he prizes. The act by which the gift of self is made to God is, properly speaking, the only one by which he is glorified; all the rest only follows and carries out that act, and draws its merit from that single source. If I



am ever so little really jealous for the glory of God, can I hesitate a moment in procuring it to him by this entire donation of myself?

Furthermore, God has his own particular designs on every separate soul; one being chosen to glorify him in this way, and another in that way. The choice of our special way does not lie with us; all that belongs to us is to correspond well with his designs on us. I do not know what his designs are for me; but I do know certainly, that they will not be perfectly carried out unless I give myself entirely up to him. He awaits this donation before manifesting his designs to me; because, before I make it, I should not consent to all his wishes, or, if I should consent, I should not have the courage to accomplish all. Jesus Christ did not make known to St Paul the great views he had for him until, quite submissive and ready for all that should be told him, he said, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" If we read the lives of the Saints attentively, we shall see that God's designs in their regard were not made known to them until they belonged completely to him—in other words, had given self to God.

What a misfortune for me if, for want of having made this donation, I should live and die without having fulfilled his designs upon me, without even having known or recognized them!

## VI

FIFTH REASON: I CAN ONLY SANCTIFY MYSELF IN  
THIS WAY

If I refuse to give myself to God, the evil will be all the greater because my own holiness depends entirely on the glory I give to God; and by this refusal, I deny his glory.

If I give to God all the glory he expects from me, I shall become a saint. But if I refuse this donation of myself (which is the only way in which I can glorify him as he desires), I shall never attain to holiness, and, perhaps, shall even endanger my salvation. Our Lord one day showed to St Teresa the place in hell which would have been hers if she had not corresponded to his designs upon her. Perhaps there is no middle way for me but that of being either a saint or a lost soul. But even if there were a middle way, and even if I were to run no risk of losing my soul, should I not yet be my own enemy if I were not to tend to all the perfection to which I am called, and to which I can never attain, except in giving myself entirely to God?

If I have faith, I ought not to value anything above, or even in comparison to, holiness, which is, for me, the principle of all happiness alike in the present and in the future life. Now, by giving myself to God I enter upon the way of holiness, and I can never enter there unless I am absolutely at his disposal, free from

self-love and self-will. For what disposition can be nearer to sanctity than that of resigning myself completely into God's Hands, in order that he may sanctify me as he wills? God is no less the only One who can make me holy, than he is himself the only Holy One, and all the holiness that can be in any creature is his work alone. He begins, he continues, and he perfects this work. All that he asks of me is to abandon myself without reserve to his leading, to put no obstacle to his work, but to second it as far as ever I can by my co-operation. He will be able to work in me successfully, just in the exact proportion as I give up my will to him as its supreme Master, for it is on my *will* chiefly that his work is done.

In thus giving myself to God, what is it that I mean to do? I intend to give, beforehand, a general consent to all and everything that he shall judge fit to do for my sanctification, and this consent clearly extends to all the particular operations of grace in me. So long as this consent is not revoked, God works freely and uninterruptedly in me, either in making me correct my faults, or inducing me to practise virtue, or to purify my intentions; every day grace takes further possession over my nature, the "old man" is destroyed, and the "new man," like a building, grows. The work advances, and finally arrives at that degree of perfection which God has designed for it. What power can hinder this work, unless I myself oppose it, and what more efficacious means can I use for my perfection, than to offer no

resistance, but to give myself up entirely to him? It is true, I can always draw back; but God, seeing my right intention and my generosity, keeps guard over me against myself, leading me to depend more and more upon him; and he influences my will so well that it fears nothing more than that I should take back the government of myself and withdraw from the guidance of God.

## VII

BY THIS GIFT OF SELF TO GOD WE FULFIL THE  
COMMAND TO LOVE HIM: AND IT IS THE ONLY  
WAY TO DO SO

So far, we have seen some great reasons for making this consecration of ourselves to God. Now let us consider some others, which are no less strong. I am bound to love God with all my heart, with all my mind, with all my soul and with all my strength. This is the first and chief command. But how can I thus love him, if all my heart, all my mind, all my soul and all my strength are not consecrated to his love? And in what other way can I consecrate them to him, except by this perfect donation of self? This reason is clear and decisive: weigh it well. You will see that the thing is utterly impossible in any other way.

The command to love God obliges us to two things: the first is never to offend him in anything whether great or small and never to allow ourselves to do anything that may displease him even in the least degree;

to keep guard over ourselves as much as possible against light faults such as first movements, and of surprise. The second is to practise (according to our state of life and passing events) those virtues which God expects us to practise and as perfectly as we possibly can; to do all in our power to please him, without regard to the cost or to the sacrifices we may have to make. This command, understood in its whole extent and as it should be understood, comprises all avoidance of evil and all doing of good. But it is possible to have the determination to fly from evil and to pursue what is good, unless we are wholly and irrevocably given up to God?

A Christian must never permit anything to lodge in his heart that may weaken charity, no matter how small the occasion may be; but on the contrary he ought to embrace all that can possibly strengthen it. He is more or less to blame if he is the cause of the friendship of God towards him becoming chilled; and he is still more culpable if, whether by negligence or laziness or indifference, he does not contribute as much as he can to its warmth and increase. But he will never fulfil these two duties or put himself in a fit state to fulfil them, except by the donation of his whole being, entirely and unreservedly, to God.

God, who alone can implant his love in us, who alone makes it increase, is certainly willing to give all the graces necessary to preserve and augment this treasure of charity within us. But these graces, without which we can do nothing, he will only give

in proportion as we abandon ourselves to him. He begins the work, but we must correspond. Without this response on our part, he will not continue his. If we use reserves towards him, we force him, so to speak, to restrain his goodness and be reserved, also, in his dealings with us. When he has shed forth his charity in our hearts by his Holy Spirit, the first fruit which he looks for is the gift of ourselves. He first witnesses his love to us, in order to call forth our love for him; and the greater the marks of his love which he lavishes on us, the greater return of love does he expect from us. It is evident, then, that these graces will only increase in proportion as we correspond, and that our correspondence will never be entire, until our donation of ourselves is so.

To wish to put any limits or have any reserves with regard to the love of God, is to go directly contrary to that love, which, on the side of its Object, is essentially infinite and which can have no bounds except those of the finite capacity of the heart that loves. We must remember that that capacity can always grow; it has no fixed limits beyond those assigned to it by God's good pleasure; on our own part we can never put a limit.

I ought to love God without measure—that is to say, with all the capacity of my heart which is always capable of extension. But I can never love him without measure if my gift of self is limited, nor with all the capacity of my heart, if that heart is not entirely devoted to him.



If it were possible for us to love God infinitely, as he loves himself, we should be obliged to love him in that way, because such love is the only love that responds to his infinite Perfections; and we are only dispensed from it because it is not in our power. We ought to love him as much as is possible with the help of his grace, which is always offered in order to increase our love. Thus the intention of God is that our love should ever be on the increase, and that we should never be satisfied with ourselves, as if we love enough, since we can, every moment of our lives, love God more.

But what is meant by love, except to give ourselves to the one we love? The peculiar characteristic of love is that it always wants to give—to give more—to give all. As long as it reserves anything it is imperfect and dissatisfied; and the heart that truly loves God cannot be content as long as the slightest thing is kept back, or the smallest reserve exists with which it can reproach itself.

The more we study the wonderful depths of the love of God, the more convinced we become of the obligation that is imposed upon us of giving ourselves to him in return. Our heart cannot rest until we have done this, nor can it habitually enjoy God or taste the celestial peace and tranquillity of his service. Let us examine ourselves on this point, and our interior state will assure us whether we fully and truly belong to God or no.

## VIII

THE EXAMPLE OF JESUS CHRIST IMPOSES ON US  
THE LAW OF GIVING OURSELVES TO GOD

As Christians we have the obligation of following in the steps of Jesus Christ; that is to say, of imitating him. To this imitation of Christ our salvation is attached. The Gospels in many places expressly teach us this, and St Paul assures us that "those whom he foreknew, he also predestinated to be made conformable to the image of his Son."<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Word was made Flesh and dwelt among us, that he might become our Model.

But in what point is he principally to be our Model? In his devotion to his Father. Here is the chief point of our resemblance to him, the most important feature, with which all the others are connected.

Now the devotedness of Jesus Christ to his Father was perfect; it began with the first instant of his Life, and was never revoked or weakened by the least irresolution; it was consummated at his last breath upon the Cross. Every decree of the Will of his Father was shown to him; each was offered for his acceptance and without hesitation he embraced all, submitted to all, however rigorous, and he fulfilled every one without omitting or neglecting the least detail. What was the whole Life of Jesus Christ

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii 29.

but an uninterrupted accomplishing of the oblation which he made when coming into the world, "Lo! I come to do thy Will."

In proportion, so should be the life of a Christian. As soon as he understands that a Christian is but a disciple and imitator of Jesus Christ, he should offer himself—as he did—to the Will of the Father, making it his duty to fulfil that Will without ever swerving from It, but obey It faithfully to his life's end. He ought to be firmly persuaded that all his steps are counted, that every turn of his path is planned and traced for him, that all that he has to do or suffer in the course of his life is ruled by Divine Providence, and that all he has to do is to walk along the way under the guidance of God. A Christian who is not truly devoted to God is not a disciple of Jesus Christ in his heart, however much he may seem to be exteriorly. A Christian who restricts his devotedness (as almost all do) is but an imperfect Christian, a feeble imitator of Jesus Christ. If it is rare to find one who has this view firmly fixed in his heart, it is because so few draw it from its true Source, the Life and Example of the Saviour.

## IX

THE SELF-DENIAL COMMANDED IN THE GOSPEL IS  
THE SAME THING AS THE GIFT OF SELF TO GOD

Jesus Christ said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and

follow me.”<sup>1</sup> Such are the two conditions which he lays upon all his followers : “ Deny—renounce thyself, and take up thy cross.” But these conditions presuppose and contain the gift of self to God, and they are really only the execution of the gift. To renounce myself, in the sense which Jesus Christ teaches, is to give myself up into the Hands of God, so that, from being an imperfect sinner, he may make me just and perfect; it is to deliver up all my faculties, that he may purify them; it is to leave off guiding myself, so that he may guide me himself by his grace, and raise me to such sanctity as will be worthy of him. A Christian only renounces himself in order that he may belong to God; as soon as he renounces himself he is no more his own, he is God’s own, and the practice of self-denial is really only the fighting and destroying of all in him that prevents his belonging wholly and solely to God. We must therefore enter on the following of Christ by an act of self-renouncement in general, which is the same thing as the gift of self to God; and then go on to the particular acts of self-renouncement, which are acts of self-denial under another name—whatever God may inspire—successively; so that we may gradually die to ourselves in order to live to him alone.

In the same way, to take up our cross and carry it, is to receive as from the Hand of God every day all the troubles, contradictions, and humiliations which occur, whether they come to us from men, from the

<sup>1</sup> St Matt. xvi 24.

devil, or from God himself. Self-denial prevents us from complaining of these and makes us endure them with resignation, patience and love, which we should not know how to do if we did not recognize that God is *Master*, and has the supreme right to dispose of us and of all that is ours, according to his good pleasure; and unless we are in the habitual state that makes us able to say, with holy Job: "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done: blessed be the Name of the Lord."<sup>1</sup>

Is it possible to speak in such a way, to keep the heart submissive and peaceful in the midst of all kinds of afflictions, unless we are truly and completely given up to God in all sincerity, with the firm determination never to take back the gift, in whatever state we may find ourselves? Is it not evident that if when under some cross we complain and murmur, all these resistances have their source in self-love and self-will, in a nature that is not really sacrificed to God, but which still lives in and for itself?

We must not then flatter ourselves by thinking to follow Jesus Christ by the way of self-denial and of the Cross, if we have not started by giving ourselves entirely to God.

<sup>1</sup> Job i 21.

## X

THE NAME OF "CHILDREN OF GOD" IMPOSES UPON US THE OBLIGATION OF GIVING OURSELVES TO HIM

As Christians, we are children of God; in Baptism we receive the grace of adoption into his Family. And this Adoption gives a character that is ineffaceable. Besides, we then enter into a sacred engagement to live as his Children. So this character will turn to our condemnation, if we deny it by our conduct. Now, St Paul declares, "Whosoever are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."<sup>1</sup> Others may be called so; but they do not fulfil their obligations, unless the Holy Spirit of God governs them.

The Spirit of God is a spirit of charity, of love, a spirit of grace, a supernatural spirit which raises us above ourselves, changing us into other men, and rendering us conformable to God in all our thoughts, our affections and our actions. This Spirit of God, as sweet as he is powerful, does no violence to us; he only leads us, or rather, takes the lead of us just so much as we agree to being led by him. Thus, in order that he may lead us in all our ways, both interior and exterior, we must have given up ourselves to God, have ceded to him all power over us, and must allow ourselves to be disposed of absolutely as he wills. If we still keep possession of ourselves

<sup>1</sup> Rom. viii 14.



and pretend to have the right to govern ourselves in anything whatever; if we offer the least resistance to that Holy Spirit; it cannot be true that we follow his leading in all things, and, in cases where his leading differs from our own will and judgement, we shall go our own way, and not act as children of God. This is a manifest consequence of the teaching of St Paul.

Remark further, a point of great importance, that just as, in quality as men and reasonable beings, we ought always to follow reason and never allow ourselves in anything contrary to that; in the same way, as Christians, we ought to follow the Holy Spirit of God, and never withdraw ourselves from him. Every interior disposition and every exterior action that the Holy Spirit would not recognize as his is blameworthy in a Christian, or, at least, deserves no praise, and is useless as merit towards salvation. According to this rule (and it is incontestable) how many works there are which are lost for heaven, how many wasted hours, in the lives of the greater number of Christians! Whence comes this useless waste, this immense loss of moments really so inestimably precious? The reason is, because they have not given themselves to God, to be governed by his Spirit in all things.

## XI

THE HOLINESS OF OUR ORDINARY ACTIONS MAKES  
THIS GIFT OF OURSELVES NECESSARY

St Paul, in whom Jesus Christ speaks to us, makes it a duty incumbent on all Christians to "do all for the glory of God," and to sanctify thus their most ordinary actions, even those which are purely animal, such as eating and drinking. That is to say, he tells them that in everything they do, they should have a supernatural intention, and to elevate thus the lowest and most earthly actions to which our human nature is subjected by necessity. For sanctity of motive makes holy the action which is done by that motive. But it is impossible to act thus, habitually, if God is not habitually the Object of our intention, if he is not the absolute Master of our mind and of our heart. Otherwise, earthly things, which act so strongly upon our senses and on our imagination and move our passions so powerfully, will attract us to them, will turn us away from our end and aim, and make us seek them for the pleasure we have in the enjoyment of them. Even if they do not draw us into these unworthy excesses, at least they soil us by innumerable small faults; they often make us lose sight of God and of the dignity of our condition to stray after the "enchantment of trifles," making us care too much for the needs and ease of the body and of all that flatters sensuality, vanity, and curiosity.

In as far as a man is not entirely belonging to God, he does not notice that crowd of imperfections which glide into the conduct, and which attach themselves to the soul like dust, tarnishing its purity and brightness. These imperfections, and the harm they do, are only discerned by the help of the divine light which is only vouchsafed in the degree that is necessary to those souls of whom God has taken full possession. When God reigns within us, he will never suffer us to act for any end that is not worthy of him—not even in the least little things—and if we do otherwise he at once reproaches us, and, exercising over us the full empire of his grace, he will inspire us to act in a more perfect manner every day.

But God will only begin to establish his reign in us from the moment when we give ourselves up entirely to him, to have no other love than his, no other interests than his, no other aim than that of pleasing him. Until then, the soul little knows how deep a matter Christian perfection is, nor the immense number of details which it includes. Hence it is that false ideas are formed, which are seldom corrected; the soul loses its relish for perfection and does not try to practise it; excusing this by the low and dangerous pretext that these things are not essentially necessary to salvation, such souls come to have a contempt for those who preach and practise a higher life, and will nourish a secret aversion from them.

## XII

THAT THE NECESSITY OF THE GIFT OF SELF TO GOD  
IS COMPRISED IN THE LORD'S PRAYER

Jesus Christ has taught us with his own Mouth the prayer that every Christian ought to make to God, and in it is included every petition which he must make. Comparatively few people pass a day without saying this prayer at least twice a day—morning and evening. But do they understand it? Do they mean it from the depths of their heart? Do they put in practice what it contains? For the most part, very far from it, because to understand, to relish and to practise this prayer, they must entirely belong to God.

Without entering on any long explanations, let us ask ourselves whether, unless we are really devoted to God, we can address him as “Father”; whether we can have in our hearts those feelings towards him which that name calls forth; whether we can behave towards him as a child ought to behave to such a Father? Let us carefully consider all the duties which respect, love, gratitude and dependence impose upon us in his regard, as his creatures and as his adopted children; and let us decide for ourselves if the first and most indispensable of our obligations is not that of irrevocably giving our heart to him.

We beg of him before all else that “his Name may be hallowed,” which means, may all the glory that is

due to thy Name be given to It. And by whom is that glory to be given? By all intelligent beings, and principally by ourselves. Our whole life, then, ought to be a continual sanctifying of his ineffable Name of God, joined to a perpetual desire that it may be sanctified by all other men. Zeal for his glory ought to burn within us and to devour us when we behold all the outrages by which that Name is dishonoured. The gift of our heart is the only means of putting us into this disposition, and if there are but few Christians truly zealous, it is because so few do really give up their hearts to God. And what is that glory that he expects from us? It is that of being loved in all things and above all things. "God," says St Augustine, "is honoured only by love." All God's commands refer to love and can be reduced to that one: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God." And what is love, if not the gift of the heart and all that results from that gift?

In the second place we ask, "may thy Kingdom come." What is his reign, if not the reign of love? And where would God wish to establish his kingdom, if not in our hearts? His reign will be completed and perfected in heaven, but it must begin on earth. And how can it begin in any one of us without the gift of our heart to him? God only reigns in us in proportion as he is the Master of our will. He cannot really dominate our hearts' affection, unless it is reduced to one Object, himself alone. His reign is only established on the destruction of self-love,

which is his capital enemy; and we only banish self-love effectually when we make the firm resolution to belong to God unreservedly. Then we begin to banish it by our own efforts seconded by grace, leaving it to God to give the last blows by which his enemy shall be destroyed.

After this we ask that "the Will of God may be done on earth as it is done in Heaven." And in this do we not simply ask, in other words, that our hearts may belong to him as perfectly as the hearts of the Blessed do, in Heaven? And that he may find no more resistance to his Will in us than he finds in them? That we may share their disinterestedness in the execution of all his wishes, with their ardour and obedience? If we have not these feelings deeply imprinted in our souls when we make this petition, it is clear that we do not enter into the intention of Jesus Christ, and do not ask our Heavenly Father in the way he wishes; we may pray in words, but our heart does not dictate them, and how can they come from a heart that is not wholly devoted to God? Such holy petitions are insincere and false on our lips; we lie to God if we refuse to give him that which he looks for from us for the sanctification of his Name, the establishment of his Kingdom, and the accomplishment of his Will. Let us examine ourselves seriously on these points, and, until we have made an entire oblation of ourselves to God, let us tremble and fear lest, in saying the Lord's Prayer, we do but add to our condemnation.



## XIII

THE DESIGNS OF GOD ON US PRESUPPOSE THE GIFT  
OF OURSELVES TO HIM

Another reason very powerful to influence us to make this offering to God must be spoken of now. In the eternal decrees of God he has destined each of his elect to a certain degree of glory. This is a point of faith: and, in consequence of this destiny, he has called each soul to a certain measure of holiness; he has prepared for it graces to follow each other, all leading up to the decisive grace of final perseverance, and, finally, he has foreseen and arranged on this plan all the circumstances and all the events of his life. But, in order to attain to this degree of glory, to fill up this measure of sanctity and not to break or interrupt this chain of graces, it is evidently necessary to make the full gift of ourselves to God at that decisive moment when he strongly moves us to belong to him alone. For he only asks this of us in order to accomplish his merciful designs in our regard. If we refuse our consent, his designs will never be carried out, and perhaps the loss of our souls will result. What I mean here by refusing to give our heart to God is, if we have the will to give him only a part, under certain conditions only, and with certain reserves. These conditions and reserves are really a refusal, for when God asks our heart, he asks it absolutely and wholly.

How many Christians are there, in every state of life, even the most holy, who die in the disfavour of God for having refused this gift of their heart? How many who have to regret deplorable falls from which they can hardly arise, and without ever being able confidently to assure themselves that God has forgiven them? How many more have lived in tepidity, in imperfection, in scruples and anxiety of conscience, shunning the pain of examining into the reason and never daring to flatter themselves of standing well with God, because they would not grant to him all that he asked of them? What torment must a Christian feel who is thus uncertain as to his greatest and most important interest!

#### XIV

THE BEST USE THAT CAN BE MADE OF FREE-WILL IS  
TO PUT AND CONFIDE IT INTO THE HANDS OF  
GOD

We all know that our salvation and perfection depend upon the good use of our free-will. We know, too, that at any instant we can abuse it, that a small fault leads us to a greater, and thus by degrees to make us reprobate. We cannot hide from ourselves that we are extremely weak; we are surrounded by temptations; and that the inclination of our heart is always towards sin. The grace of God, it is true, is never wanting to us either to preserve us from falling or to help us to rise again after a fault; but

nothing is commoner than to fall short of grace, and it is in this that we are so very culpable. Free-will is given us to save us, and the greater number use it to their own perdition.

Whence comes this misfortune, and what chiefly causes it? The cause is that so few souls give their free-will utterly into the Hands of God, who alone can govern them safely and secure them from turning aside to the left or the right. So long as we insist on being the masters of our own will and aim at disposing of ourselves, we shall always be in danger of misusing our liberty; and if this does not lead actually to our eternal loss of salvation, at least it always prevents our attaining any degree of sanctity. But if we humbly recognize our own weakness and blindness we shall beg of God that he will take charge of us; if we are resolved never to decide by our own judgement on any matter of importance, if we consult him that we may know his Will and wait till he shows it, either by an interior voice or by that of authority and counsel, then we need not fear that we shall make a bad use of our free-will; it will be no longer we who must answer for ourselves, but God will answer for us; and the care which he will take of his own glory, the tender love he has for us will guarantee us from all dangers, and will infallibly lead us to the port of a happy eternity.

Being persuaded, as indeed we ought to be, of this truth, how can we hesitate for a moment to entrust God with our whole liberty alike of will and

of action? How can we dare to take a single step by ourselves, to form plans, and embark on schemes which may have results for our salvation of which we know nothing? These plans and projects, you say, have nothing bad in them, and, as far as you can see, there is nothing to injure your conscience about them.

It may be so; but you cannot foresee the results which may follow in regard to your soul: you do not know whether such and such a state of life, such a connection, such a journey or such a change of dwelling-place may not be an occasion of sin to you, may not become the source of loss of faith or perversion of morals. The precipice does not show itself when you start on your road. But there may be one; God can see it; and he will preserve you from it if you are resolved to go nowhere without consulting him.

“But how is this?” you may reply. “Has God then given me liberty, free-will, only that I should give it up and reduce myself to a state of continual slavery? I could not dispose of myself or be my own master in anything!”

I reply: God has given you liberty, that you may use it in his service; and, consequently, that you may do him homage by it and always keep it ready to submit to his Will. It was not that you might withdraw from dependence on him that he gave you freedom, but he gave it to you in order that your very dependence might be voluntary and of your own free

choice. He has shown you the rights he has over you; the need that you have to depend upon him, the advantages you will derive from that dependence, and the risks you will run if you do not leave yourself in his Hands; after all this, he leaves you to decide for yourself.

Can you deny that the best use you can make of your liberty is to devote it to follow the views of God and to consecrate yourself to him, that he may govern you by his providence and by his grace? Do you call this being reduced to slavery? On the contrary, it is the way to enter into the full liberty of the children of God. You will dispose of yourself in everything, but you will do so in accordance with his good pleasure which you will have made your own, in giving yourself to him. If this be a servitude, it is a servitude of love, that of the angels and saints in heaven; it is the very source of happiness for you; nor can you know happiness in any other way, either in this life or in the next.

## XV

### THE GIFT OF OURSELVES TO GOD IS THE KEY OF THE GOSPEL

To all of us, the right understanding of the Gospel is a matter of the greatest importance, since it is the rule of our life and also that by which we shall be judged by Jesus Christ who is its author. This rule contains two things: the doctrine of Jesus Christ and

his example, which is the most trustworthy and infallible interpretation of it. But we shall never well understand either that teaching or that example, still less shall we relish it and put ourselves in the way of following it, unless we begin by giving ourselves to God seriously. The reason of this is clear, because all is supernatural that Jesus Christ teaches and shows by word or example; all is above our natural lights; and we can only understand it in so far as we are enlightened by grace.

Now God only enlightens our minds in the same proportion as we submit to him and as he finds us docile to his inspirations. We shall therefore never be more than imperfectly enlightened unless we are in utter and entire dependence of mind upon God. This is the reason why so few Christians, so few priests, so few religious have any depth of knowledge of Christian ethics. The saints themselves did not really understand, until they gave themselves utterly to God. St Augustine says as much in his *Confessions*. To how many otherwise learned men might it not be said, in regard to the Gospel ethics, as Jesus Christ said to Nicodemus, "Art thou a master in Israel, and knowest not these things?"<sup>1</sup> An ignorant person or a simple woman who truly serves God might give them lessons !

And yet more, these ethics which surpass our own lights war against the inclinations of our nature; pride and self-love have an extreme aversion to evan-

<sup>1</sup> St John iii 10.



gelical morality. Anyone who studies himself sincerely will be unable to deny it; and it is because the heart does not relish it that so many false reasons are invented as excuses to dispense from the obligation. There is but one royal way, sole and efficacious, by which this disgust and aversion can be overcome; and this is none other than to detach ourselves utterly from every creature and from self, in order to give oneself absolutely over to God. Until this resolution is firmly taken, Christian morality will be regarded as an intolerable yoke—one to which we subject ourselves the very least possible, and as a heavy burden from which we would fain be free.

But can we find one single being sincerely given to God who does not feel and assert that his yoke is full of sweetness and his burden light? It is love that makes him feel this; and God fills him with that love in recompense of the gift which he has made of his whole heart.

Finally, the practice of this strict Gospel morality is, indeed, above and beyond our own strength. When we perfectly understand it and have for it a most lively attraction, we have need of a special grace to enable us to put it into execution, to strengthen us that we do not shrink from difficulties, to help us to surmount obstacles and to encourage us to persevere to the end in the war against ourselves.

To whom does God give these privileged graces? Does he give them to the tepid and lazy, who only serve him from fear lest they shall be lost? Or to

those who do so from mercenary motives, who argue as to how much they *must* give him, and who *do* give him as little as possible? Who love themselves, in short, more than they love him? No; these reservoirs of help are kept for generous souls, who, with a right intention, and in all sincerity, make the gift of themselves to God without bargaining or making any conditions, but who wish to belong to him utterly and without reserves. What can God refuse to a soul who has entirely given itself to him, and who is determined to do all and to suffer all to please him? What will he not give to one who has quite abandoned himself to his guidance, and has made over to him, really and for ever, all the rights which he had over himself? The certain fruit of the gift of self to God will be the knowledge, the love and the practice of all the Gospel maxims.

Let us pause a little here, and reflect on what has just been read. I would ask you, Have you yet considered carefully the points suggested? Do they seem to you to be true, reasonable and important; decisive for your eternal salvation and also for your present happiness? If it is so, give thanks to God; but now that you have heard his voice, harden not your heart. Offer to him this heart which he asks of you and which so many reasons urge you to consecrate to him.

## XVI

WHAT QUALITIES OUGHT TO CHARACTERIZE THE  
GIFT OF SELF TO GOD

What qualities should characterize this gift? I have already written of them in my former works, *Characteristics of True Devotion* and *Spiritual Maxims*. You might read these again, but it is not necessary. Everyone can easily understand that this gift should be such as God deserves, such as he desires, or rather as he demands from every Christian by the command which he has given, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God," and such as he expects, finally, from each one in particular. He explains this by his inspirations which he gives to each soul singly. All that is necessary is to be in the disposition to listen to grace, and determined to correspond with it faithfully. The gift must be entire, absolute and irrevocable; entire, without any exception; absolute, admitting no conditions; irrevocable, embracing every moment of life until the last breath. These three words contain the characteristic qualities of the gift of self to God.

Let us make this gift, then, as fully as is possible, as he wills to give himself to us for all eternity—entirely, for ever, and with a love beyond all understanding. Is it too much, that we who owe all to God, who are not able to find happiness except in possessing him—is it too much, I ask, that we should

belong to him during the short space of this present life, in the way that he has promised to belong to us for ever and ever ?

Let us give ourselves to God, as Jesus Christ our Model gave himself to his Father. The offering which our Saviour made went as far as it could possibly go, and ours ought to resemble it in the measure suited to us. Jesus Christ had in himself the fullness of grace, and he accepted also the fullness of self-sacrifice. Our self-sacrifice ought to correspond with the measure of grace that we have received. God asks no more than this, but also he does not ask less; he expects the full effects of the grace he gives.

We ought to give ourselves to Jesus Christ, as he has given himself to us. We can say, in the words of St Paul, he "loved me and delivered himself for me."<sup>1</sup> To what did he "deliver himself"? To all that the justice of God demanded of him, that he might save me from hell, and open to me the gates of Heaven.

With what love did he "deliver himself"? Who could express, or even imagine its extent ?

In return, what does he ask of me ?

That I should love him and give up myself to him. Not content with offering himself upon the Cross once, he continues to offer himself every day upon our altars; he gives himself to us, he unites himself to us and incorporates himself with us in the Sacra-

<sup>1</sup> Gal. ii 20.

ment of the Eucharist every time that we approach the holy Table. Can I, then, do less than give to him all that I am, when he gives All that he is to me—his Flesh, his Blood, his Soul and his Divinity?

## XVII

### OF THE ADVANTAGES OF THE GIFT OF SELF TO GOD

We will now consider the advantages which result from the gift of ourselves to God in the manner described. In general, the first thing to be remarked is that these advantages are immense and surpass all that the human mind can conceive.

And first, as to what concerns the life to come, it is certain that the happiness of a soul that gave itself during this life without reserve to God, surpasses immeasurably that which is common to all the elect. For God rewards in Heaven, not so much the good works of a soul, as the dispositions in which they were done and the love which prompted them. It does not depend on ourselves whether we do great things for God, but we can always love him much; this does depend upon us. What, then, will be the reward of a soul which, giving itself utterly to God, loves him as much as he wishes it should love him, as much as it has grace to love him, as much as the heart is capable of loving him? After such a donation, if that soul has all the necessary conditions, and if, notwithstanding human faults and fragility, it has per-

severed constantly, at whatever time and in whatever way death may take place, do you think it will have to go to Purgatory? No; it will go straight to Heaven, which is open to pure charity; and by its gift of self to God, the soul has put itself into the way of pure charity, where advance is continual so long as it does not take back its gift.

What a treasure of merit it will heap up for itself every moment and by the least of its actions, because of the purity and excellence of its dispositions! Although the motive of its own interests is not shut out, yet it does not dwell upon that, nor keep it in view, for it is entirely occupied with God and with his love.

But the more it forgets itself, the more God thinks of it and notices what is done for his sake alone. God, who is Love itself, recognizes his own Image in its love, and he will, undoubtedly, lavish all his riches, with ineffable pleasure, on a soul that has been all love for him.

With regard to the present life, there is no greater happiness than that enjoyed by a soul wholly devoted to God, and to think the contrary would be an error equally injurious to God and hurtful to piety; experience teaches the truth, and the saints, without exception, bear witness to it. No one of these has ever, for so much as a single instant, regretted the gift made to God of his entire being, but has only wished that it were possible to be more utterly his and to love him more faithfully. And whose testi-



mony can we receive on such a point, if not that of the saints?

Besides, if union with God will be our supreme joy in Heaven, why should it not be so also upon earth? Is God less our highest Good in this life than he will be in the next? The devil's delight is to exaggerate the pain and troubles of an interior life, in order to dissuade us from entering upon it. We must take care to turn a deaf ear to his suggestions and always to remember that he is the enemy of God and of our own soul. He wishes to make us lose our souls, and tries to prevent us from giving glory to God by making to him an absolute surrender of self.

## XVIII

### FIRST ADVANTAGE FOR THE PRESENT LIFE: MORAL CERTAINTY OF SALVATION

To enter now into details, let us consider what is the first advantage which we gain in the present life, by making the gift of self to God. It is the assurance of salvation, so far as that can be assured during our lifetime. Of course, absolute certainty cannot be assured, for we can never answer for ourselves in the future; but it gives us a confidence and tranquillity of mind that nothing can disturb.

It enables us to say to ourselves: "I am in the Hands of God; if I do not, of my own free-will, take myself out of his Hands, how can I perish? All the powers of hell cannot tear me away from his clasp.

My salvation is not my own affair now; it is his. My part is to love him, to think of nothing but how to please and obey him. God loves me: my faith teaches me that he does; I love him: my conscience is my witness that I do, and in a way that I cannot doubt. As long as I am faithful to him, he will keep me in perseverance. Whatever may happen to me, so long as I keep the love of God I shall be happy, and there I shall find my paradise."

Except during the time of certain interior trials, this is the habitual state of trustful certainty of salvation in which the soul devoted to God lives and rests; and, instead of these trials disturbing and weakening its peace, on the contrary, it turns them to its advantage by strengthening its trust, so that, though by the black temptations of the devil it may seem to itself to be lost, yet it is more tranquil than others about eternal salvation in the intervals of peace during these horrible temptations.

In the intentions of God, the object of those temptations is really that love of him may be purified and that the soul may be brought through them to a sacrifice of self approaching to that of Jesus Christ upon the Cross, when he was utterly abandoned into his Father's Hands. And when this sacrifice has been made by the soul, it arises, as it were, resuscitated in newness of life, where it tastes beforehand in some degree the joys of heaven.

## XIX

SECOND ADVANTAGE FOR THE PRESENT LIFE:  
FREEDOM FROM ALL PAIN OF CONSCIENCE

The second advantage which is gained by those who, courageously and generously, make this donation, is, that it preserves them from all scruples, anxieties and pains of conscience, from all restless and troublesome reflection on themselves. Whatever may be the various causes of these tormenting disturbances, the principal is that the soul who feels them is not entirely devoted to God. I can appeal on this point to people of good will, without entering into any detailed proof. Nothing is so free, unfettered, serene and joyful as a conscience of a soul entirely belonging to God. Such a one goes on safely, without troubling itself as to where it is, because it does not walk by itself, but God is leading it by the hand. If it should happen to make a false step, it soon recovers its balance; if it stumbles or falls, he raises it again; if it has to go through any dangerous way, he carries it in his arms. A simple look at its Beloved, if it has committed any fault, suffices to restore its peace; it casts a loving glance at him to ascertain if he is displeased, and he cannot disregard such an appeal, but quickly reassures the soul, pardoning it, restoring it to his good grace, and lavishing on it even more caresses than before, and this to such excess that the soul itself is astonished at his

goodness and cannot refrain from crying out, "How good is God unto Israel, unto them that are of a right heart."<sup>1</sup>

## XX

THE THIRD ADVANTAGE FOR THE PRESENT LIFE :  
FAMILIAR FRIENDSHIP WITH GOD

From the moment that the soul has given up itself utterly to God, it seems as if all those attributes of his which might otherwise terrify it, have disappeared from its sight, and that now it sees only those which invite it to love him and put all its confidence in him. The severe truths of religion, which formerly affected it in so lively a way and which it hardly dared contemplate, now make no painful impression; all its attraction turns to those which are consoling, and apt to encourage and strengthen; in these it finds the most delicious food for meditation. No longer does the soul look upon God as Master, Judge, or Revenger of his Justice; but as the best of Fathers, the most tender Spouse and the most intimate Friend. It speaks to him with a holy familiarity and about his own interests; it confides to him all its pains and troubles; sometimes it even has the boldness to reproach him sweetly, and this, far from displeasing or offending him, is welcome from the soul, since it has made its donation fully and generously. In short, it seems as if love had made it the equal of the Divine Spouse. No one can imagine the tranquillity,

<sup>1</sup> Ps. lxxii 1.

ease, liberty and sweetness of this Heart-to-heart friendship with God. It can only be known by experience. The holy author of the *Imitation of Christ* calls it "a familiarity altogether wonderful."

## XXI

FOURTH ADVANTAGE FOR THE PRESENT LIFE:  
INTERIOR PEACE

In the fourth place, the soul enjoys a profound and unalterable peace. Not only in the earlier stages after its complete donation does God deluge it with delights, but far more when, later on, he proves and crucifies his lover. It is true that, then, the peace of the soul is less a sensible peace; but it is all the more stable and intimate. When it suffers, it is well pleased; and, far from wishing for relief, it would fain suffer more. This is precisely true; the ordinary run of Christians will not credit it, but neither have they any conception of the invincible force of divine love. Because those truly given to God never withdraw themselves from the Bosom of his love, they can say with David, "In peace, in the selfsame I will sleep, and I will rest: for thou, O Lord, hast singularly established me in hope."<sup>1</sup>

Who can disturb this soul? What can trouble it? Can human events do so? It is raised above all earthly things, because it has its heart fixed in God. Can its past sins? As soon as it gave itself

<sup>1</sup> Ps. iv 9, 10.

to God, his first act was to forgive all these and take away every distressing doubt. Can its daily weaknesses shake this confident peace? It humbles itself for them, but they do not cause trouble. Can its slowness in progress in virtue cast it down? All this is left to the judgement of God; it is satisfied to keep going on, without examining whether it is advancing. Do the suggestions of the devil worry it? They may, indeed, act on the imagination, but cannot reach the depths of the soul, where peace dwells. Does it ever fear lest God has left it? It knows that he is never the first to leave. Has it the terror of not persevering to the end? It hopes all from the faithfulness of God and nothing from itself. Such is the state of holy security in which it passes its days, and which increases as the last hour of life draws near.

## XXII

### THE FIFTH ADVANTAGE IN THE PRESENT LIFE:

#### THE SPECIAL PROTECTION OF GOD

Undoubtedly God has a particular protection for his chosen ones; Jesus Christ himself assures us that not one of them shall perish. But a still more special care is that with which he protects those souls who have utterly given themselves to him. And this protection is not merely limited to making their salvation sure, but it embraces every detail that can contribute to their sanctification. He never leaves them for a single instant alone; his Eyes are



ever open upon them watching over all their ways; he supports them in temptation; he keeps them from dangers and takes care of them as "the pupil of his Eye," as the Scriptures tell us; and so disposes all his plans that "all things work together for their good"—that is, for their spiritual advantage. He himself selects and chooses the guide who must direct them and be a principal instrument to their sanctification, and he inspires this guide with the same care and affection for them that he has. If, by the arrangements of Providence, such a guide is lacking, God himself takes the place and leads them personally in his own way.

Deeply penetrated by so much goodness, as well on the part of God as on that of his minister, and seeing that all things, even those which appear contrary, all unite in contributing to its perfection and advancement, the soul exclaims, "The Lord ruleth me: and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture."<sup>1</sup>

### XXIII

#### THE SIXTH ADVANTAGE IN THE PRESENT LIFE: THE GIFT OF PRAYER

I am not surprised that the Gift of Prayer is so rare among Christians, since it is specially reserved for souls who give themselves entirely to God. It is true that to some God gives this gift as a preventing grace; but it is in order to attract them to be entirely

<sup>1</sup> Ps. xxii 1, 2.

devoted to him and make the absolute gift of themselves. If they refuse to do this, God withdraws the gift of prayer.

We may conclude, as a rule, that to every soul entirely given to God he grants the inestimable favour of the gift of prayer. The soul may know that she has it, or, for some good reason, God may keep her in ignorance. Equally we may consider that, as a rule, the gift is not given unless the firm purpose has been made of abandoning self utterly to God; or it is given only for a short time, or the soul that thinks it is given deludes itself. Thus the gift of self to God, with all the consequences, is the necessary touchstone of true prayer.

This prayer is all love; as well on God's side as on that of the soul. It is easy, sweet and so nourishing to the heart, that those who have this gift would like to exercise it always; they leave it regretfully, and find that any dealings with men have become painful, irksome and well-nigh insupportable. What caresses, what favours does not God lavish on such a soul! It scarcely knows what to do with itself, nor how to express the transports of its gratitude. If you feel any doubt of the truth of what I say, read St Augustine's account of what he experienced after his conversion. Read what many other saints have written or recounted of themselves.

This gift of prayer, which at first is like a sweet and penetrating dew, generally becomes dry and naked in its progress; but it is none the less peaceful;

rather more so, and more intimate, uniting the soul to God in a more immediate way. It is no longer a prayer of the powers of the soul, but of the very essence of the soul itself, which is carried on in the deepest silence, and is an image of that peaceful and ineffable joy which God has in himself.

In a word, by this prayer the soul buries itself every day more and more deeply in God, until it is entirely absorbed and lost in him.

## XXIV

### THE SEVENTH ADVANTAGE IN THIS LIFE: ENTRANCE INTO THE WAY OF HOLINESS

Finally, as I have already said, by this donation we enter upon the way of true holiness, of that sanctity which is entirely the work of God and where the creature has nothing to do but leave itself to him, to be destroyed and rebuilt by its own simple co-operation: neither going forward to do, nor resisting in any point, but working only according to the movement of the Divine action. What can we do towards our sanctification by all our efforts and attempts of which grace is not the principle? Nothing at all. Absolutely, utterly nothing. "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it."<sup>1</sup>

It is just the same with our watchfulness to preserve ourselves from harm; "Unless the Lord keep the city, he watches in vain that keeps it."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ps. cxxvi 1.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

All that is in our own power with grace, all that we can do for the best, and all that God expects from us, is to say to him in all confidence: "*Here I am, Lord; I have neither light nor strength. All my promises and resolutions avail nothing; I can neither make them nor keep them without thee. Do thou take charge of my soul; I abandon it into thy Hands; sanctify it in whatever way shall please thee. I will do nothing in this work but by thy orders and under thy direction.*"

Thus the saints said, and so they did from the moment when they elected to become saints. If I may so say, they despaired of themselves and put their trust in God alone. If some of these at the outset gave the rein too much to their fervour and ran into pious excesses, they changed their conduct afterwards; they learnt not to give way to their imagination or natural character, to impetuous and ir-temperate zeal, but to await the impulse of God's grace; to follow it step by step, and not to press on beyond it. At last they saw by interior light and by experience that their sanctification was the work of God and not theirs, and that the way to advance was simply to second his action and never to impede it.

## XXV

### PRACTICAL RECAPITULATION

You will ask me, What must I do in order to give myself to God? Does it not depend more upon his grace than on myself? Is not this gift really the act

of the most exalted love? Is it in my power to produce such an act?

To this I reply: It is indeed in your own power, if you wish, to make such an act; because on God's part all is ready, since he desires nothing so much as the possession of your heart. Do, then, with all confidence, all that depends on you.

I am supposing that in the reading of this little work God has made you feel an ardent wish to give yourself entirely to him. The way to strengthen and nourish this desire is to make often during the day such acts as the following:

O God, you have not given me this desire in vain; grant that I may put it into execution. When shall I give myself all up to thee? Why should I delay to give thee my heart? What prevents thee from being Master of my heart? Ah! happy moment when I shall be able to say, God is all mine, so I am all his!

Take this thought with you everywhere; make it the chief object of your prayers; offer your Communions for this intention. One spark of love, if well fostered, soon becomes a great fire.

Above all, whilst you are begging this favour from God, be very careful to be faithful to grace in every particular, not permitting in yourself any voluntary fault or negligence; and if such escape you, turn at once to God and tell him how sorry you are. Perhaps God will be a long time preparing you; perhaps grace will give it you in one moment. But if, per-

severingly, you will go on in the way I have shown you, it is impossible that you should fail to produce at last the act that is unspeakably desirable.

When you have made it, you will know it by the change you will feel in your heart. You will be, interiorly, a changed being.

I shall not attempt to reply to the various difficulties which may be brought in opposition to what I have said. Whoever is capable of making these vain and curious objections can have no serious wish, as yet, to belong entirely to God.











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